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The Fringe Awakens

~ [Alex Walsh](#)



Although the Fringe Festival is now in its fourth year, this is the first for me. If we're being honest, it's actually my first theater festival. So I'm easing into it. Only two shows today! After number nine on Sunday, we can all look back at how young and naïve I was at this moment.

I got into the neighborhood a bit early for my first show – actually the opener for the whole festival, a 3:45 performance of *Penelope's Dragon*. So after changing out of my work clothes in the car, I decided to jog through the rain and kick things off with a beer at James Street Gastropub. Which wasn't technically open, but it was the bartender's last day, so he bent the rules a bit. A good omen.

For this performance, Artists Image Resource was hosting Puppets in Performance – a group organized by Darlene Fedele Thompson, who wrote and directed *Penelope's Dragon*. This musical comedy riffs on the standard fairy tale plot: dragon terrorizes village and kidnaps a fair maiden, dashing knight sets off to rescue her. Except in this case, the dragon and the maiden are perfectly happy together. They met at a Ren faire and she brought him home to meet the family (who were none too pleased). And the knight's a bit hapless and greedy. The dragon is totally terrorizing the village, though. All things considered, the Queen's anti-dragon policy seems fairly well justified.



Fedele Thompson, who constructs many of her own puppets, did a great job with this show. Drake, the titular dragon, is represented by three distinct puppets at different points, with the final one impressively sequined and floppy-tongued. Sir Dirk, the knight, sports a helmet vizor that flaps animatedly when he talks, perfectly matching the G.O.B. Bluth-y airheaded arrogance that actor Chris Cattell voices for him. The set consists of a series of wheeled platforms that rotate from the sides of the

stage to the center as needed. As much fun as it is to watch the puppets, I also enjoyed keeping an eye on the actors who weren't currently performing setting the props for each scene while trying to hide behind the platforms.

At only 45 minutes, *Penelope's Dragon* is a fun, quick show. The playbill says it's rated PG, but I don't think anyone should feel uncomfortable bringing kids to see it. In addition to Fedele Thompson (as Lester the Jester and Penelope's father) and Cattell (who also voices Seth the zookeeper), the cast features Elena Egusquiza as Penelope and a second dragon who may or may not have been named, Joe Milliren as Drake, and Nupur Charyalu as Queen Ellie (not Nellie). Pro tip: keep an eye on Charyalu. She's acting along with the puppet the whole time and it's great. The next two performances of this show are at Alphabet City. So don't show up at AIR expecting puppets. You'll only be disappointed.