

# ThreeWeeks IN EDINBURGH

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FRINGE REVIEW

## CHILDREN'S SHOWS

### Bubblewrap And Boxes

Asking For Trouble

A big pile of cardboard boxes sits upon the stage. It is home to a strange little man, who happily spends his days arranging his boxes and making sure everything is just so. His world is peaceful, until a large box mysteriously appears, containing a girl, who shatters his tranquillity by forcing him to interact with her and moving his boxes about! There then follows a fantastic hour's entertainment, as the pair display excellent clowning skills whilst gradually becoming friends. Performed almost wordlessly, as the characters can only communicate when reading out lost letters that have found their way to their cardboard world, this show is a delight. Imagine 'WALL-E', but with fewer robots and more cardboard.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, 3 - 21 Aug (not 8, 15), 10.45am (11.45am), £7.00 - £9.00, fpp20 tw rating 4/5 [im]

### Flamenco For Kids!

Ricardo Garcia's Flamenco Flow (UK And Spain)

The stage goes black at the start of the show and, I wonder, where is the kids' show?! A lone guitarist is bathed in red light. And then, accompanied by his two dancers, Ricardo Garcia treats us to his new composition. I was completely caught by surprise - a moving, emotional, intensely passionate flamenco almost brought me to tears, for the short time it was on. Then - confusion over - the kids' show begins! And what fun it is, for children and parents alike; it is clear that everyone is enjoying the lesson in flamenco dancing thoroughly, one dad, in particular, taking it very seriously. A great children's show; I can't wait to see the one for grown-ups!

C eca, 3 - 29 Aug (not 15, 16, 17, 18, 19), 1.30pm (2.20pm), £4.50 - £8.50, fpp21. tw rating 4/5 [lc]

### The Little Mermaid Ballet

Burklyn Youth Ballet

A beautiful rendition of a fairytale convention, 'The Little Mermaid Ballet' is based on the Hans Christian Anderson story, rather than the more popular Disney version; with a much happier ending, however. Expressive and wonderfully performed by a talented young cast, this lavish extravaganza presented a tale of magic, love, and oceanic escapades. Though speech was absent from the piece as it is indeed a ballet, the colourful exposure and dazzling costumes evoked reverence from the entire audience - even its youngest members, who proved attentive throughout the entire show. As the ballet drew to a spectacular close, children were invited to meet the affable cast, allowing for a unique opportunity to finally become acquainted with their storybook favourites.

Zoo Southside, 11 - 20 Aug, 10.30am (11.30am), £8.00 - £10.00, fpp24. tw rating 4/5 [ma]



**SNAP OF THE DAY: 'Rachael's Cafe'** at Jekyll & Hyde is based on a true story. And earlier this week the real Rachael flew in from Bloomington, Indiana to see the play for the first time, meeting actor Graham Elwell. Photo: Stuart Armitt

## COMEDY

### The Leeds Tealights: Animals With Jobs

Leeds Tealights

Like the elusive needle in a haystack, a good sketch show is hard to find; 'Animals With Jobs' is excellent. In an hour of tightly-packed jokes, the laughs just keep coming as sketch after sketch hits the mark. From a board of executives to a medal-winning schoolboy, the characters and their situations get more and more ridiculous and the jokes funnier and funnier; a highlight is the recurring sketch about 'Groundhog Day'. There are a couple of lulls and a bit too much emphasis on bringing old jokes back, especially towards the end, but these are just minor niggles in an otherwise excellent show. In a few years they'll be packing out the bigger venues, so see them here while you still can.

Just The Tonic At The Store, 4 - 28 Aug (not 16), 5.00pm (6.00pm), £7.00 - £8.00, fpp109. tw rating 4/5 [eb]

### Aisle16 R Kool!

Tim Clare, John Osborne, Luke Wright

This was, without question, one of the most enjoyable hours I have ever spent. The three poets perform three pieces, and the audience is encouraged to notice the "coolest" of the three as there will be a vote at the end - hence the act's title. The poetry is witty, fresh and modern, with a Tony Harrison-style awareness of the weird space the contemporary poet occupies.

My favourite line is from a poem about hipsters - "You're French and underground, like the Hadron Collider" - whilst possibly my favourite poem was the brilliant 'Model'. The sweet and personal mixes wonderfully with the satirical and biting, and the three poets had the audience in stitches.

The Banshee Labyrinth, 5 - 27 Aug (not 16), 10.00pm (10.50pm), free, fpp35. tw rating 5/5 [at]

### Aidan Bishop: Misspelled

Aidan Bishop

Sadly for Aidan Bishop, an undiagnosed dyslexic until the age of twenty-eight, this educational stand-up show about the difficulties of linguistic-processing could be compared to an incorrectly written word: all necessary elements are present, but something isn't quite right about the presentation. An affable and humble American, Bishop complains of bearing the brunt of condescending family jokes as he struggled in high school during the 1990s. Although the tables have turned now that he makes his living as a punchline-writer, his good-natured humour is pleasant and interesting, though never phenomenal. 'Misspelled' will challenge Festival audience's attitudes towards this unfortunate learning condition, but won't have them rolling with laughter. Consider it a mildly diverting lecture.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, 3 - 28 Aug (not 15), 9.00pm (10.00pm), £7.50 - £9.50, fpp35. tw rating: 2/5 [jf]

### A Kind of Surprise

Masud Milas and Sean Brightman

This is sit-down comedy at its most meandering and affable. What little structured material there is here is essentially a plug for these comedians' other shows. So while there is certainly comedic potential, it is never realised. Mainly, this is because Masud Milas and Sean Brightman seem to view this show as nothing but a warm-up for the rest of the day's performances. Though there are moments of humour, it seemed more like they were making each other laugh, leaving the audience feeling as though they were witness to two friends having a jokey conversation. If you want to see either of these comedians, I recommend going to one of their actual shows rather than this hour long preamble.

Dragonfly, 6 - 27 Aug (not 9, 16, 23), 3.10pm (4.10pm), free, fpp105. tw rating 2/5 [sj]

### About Tam O'Shanter

Bruce Fummey

Anyone who has not been to a Burns' Supper will find the majority of Bruce Fummey's set difficult to follow. A Scottish comic for a Scottish audience, the show begins with some of his older material - the science-based comedy of a funny Brian Cox. This is relatively successful and receives gentle laughter. His actual set, however, is more interesting and informative - but it isn't comedy. Those who are unfamiliar with Scottish culture may find that the

cont>>

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cont>> majority of his set goes over their heads. Many jokes are in the standard misdirection vein and are barely surprising or original, with audience members pre-empting the punchlines. Though not particularly comedic, perhaps Fummey should begin looking into a career in lecturing.

LaughingHorse @ The Beehive Inn, 4 - 28 Aug (not 15, 22), 8.00pm (9.00pm), £3.50 - £7.00, fpp33. tw rating 2/5 [jlb]

### Kev Orkian: The Guilty Pianist

Kev Orkian

Some molto vivace piano medleys are plonked out. Yet there is actually not much piano involved: the set is a series of cheap shots at immigrants, gays, the Swahili language, and Essex - just like in the good old 1950s. Orkian's puncturing of classical airs - falling asleep on 'Moonlight Sonata' or yelling "BOGEY!" - is charming, as is his character's brusqueness (though it's always directed at women). Impressively, he manages to be both camp and blockish. The brief show's highlight is his comparative history of Western and "Armenian" dancing, where Orkian demonstrates a flair for movement. But this generally feels like a showcase for a longer, older show: it aims for Dudley Moore and ends up gently a bore.

SpaceCabaret@54, 10 - 27 Aug, 7:05pm, £10.00 - £12.00, fpp160. tw rating: 2/5 [gl]

### Late Night Gimp Fight!

Phil McIntyre Entertainments

Do you find the word "gimp" inherently amusing? If so, you will love this depraved and scatological comedy show with every fibre of your twisted being. As I was exposed to taboo sketches about abortion, bestiality and cannibalism - and that's just the beginning of the alphabet - I quickly learned to expect the unexpected punchline, which dissipated the shock-waves of every macabre conclusion. Paradoxically, their enjoyable but less than knock-out performance would have been far more controversial and unpredictable if they'd included several innocent palate-cleansers to rejuvenate such frequently repetitive proceedings. Most likely, you will snigger mischievously during the first twenty minutes, lose the battle against your increasingly guilty conscience before half time, then feel ashamed of yourself for the remainder.

Pleasance Courtyard, 3 - 29 Aug (not 20), 10.30pm (11.30pm), £8.00 - £12.00, fpp107. tw rating 3/5 [jf]

### Mabbs and Justice: Love Machine

Mabbs and Justice

The audience are supposedly attending a conference led by Jeff Alesbottom, the deluded dating agent who promises very little for the agency fee of £5999.95. The show sees James Mabbett and Adam Justice transform into different characters to explain the history and art of seduction. While the concept holds a lot of promise, the show itself is woefully unfunny. Mabbett spends the better part of the hour alternately screaming in various accents and then writhing around the stage, presumably in the hopes of distracting from the weak material. Justice meanwhile takes a more reserved approach to his performance, but instead of complementing Mabbett's style, it appears disjointed. Inspiring no love from here, it's a horribly awkward hour for all involved.

Just The Tonic at The Store, 7 - 28 Aug (not 16), 3.00pm (4.00pm), £6.00 (£8.00), fpp113. tw rating 1/5 [ec]

### Jessica Ransom: Unsung Heroes

Phil McIntyre Entertainments By Arrangement With Dawn Sedgwick Management

Buzzing with energy, Jessica Ransom presents us with a plethora of character-based sketches - from the Andy Serkis school of CGI to working out 'Bounty Hunter' style, most are guaranteed to raise a laugh. In a media age of celebrity culture, all eyes are focused on public figures, but Ransom wants to turn this situation around. The focus of her show is on the unsung heroes of this world - the IT technicians, dinner ladies and health and safety officers who keep the world going around. Some of the sketches don't seem to connect with the audience, but the rest make up for these. Leaping from one character to the next, Ransom provides an entertaining hour of jovial comedy.

Pleasance Courtyard, 3 - 29 Aug (not 15), 5.10pm (6.10pm), £8.00 - £10.00, fpp97. tw rating 3/5 [mp]

### Mark Dolan - Sharing Too Much

Mick Perrin For Just For Loughs Live

Mark Dolan, better known for hunting out the world's tallest and smallest, is back in Edinburgh to share too much on stage - including his mother's sexual fantasies (according to him) and the details of his "walk on the dark side" - i.e. claiming not to have an advantage card in Boots knowing full well it is in his pocket... dangerous! His anecdotes are funny and quirky, as he fondly remembers the moment he was asked by a prostitute to "slow down" and the memorable time he was mistaken for a lesbian. I was, however, disappointed that he spent half the show chatting to one or two members of the audience, as I was keen to hear more of his excellent material.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, 3 - 29 Aug (not 16), 7.00pm (8.00pm), £7.00 - £9.50, fpp113. tw rating 4/5 [dg]

### McNeil And Pamphilon: Which One Are You?

McNeil And Pamphilon

Never have a comedy duo been so fixated on each other's balls. If Morecambe and Wise were born in the 1980s and found themselves in dissatisfying nine-to-five jobs, then perhaps they would have written a sketch show a little like this. McNeil and Pamphilon had a marvellous bromance and a comedic chemistry that was wonderfully self-evident, spawning a series of electrifying gags which were executed with enviable panache and an endearing and relaxed comic presence. With a mix of musical numbers and exquisitely timed sketches, they played superbly off each other's foibles in a fine example of sharp, cut-and-thrust comedy. Come! Gorge your humour-bones on casually-styled, face-achingly funny comedy.

Pleasance Dome, 3 - 28 Aug (not 17), 5.40pm (6.35pm), £7.00 - £9.50, fpp117. tw rating 5/5 [jlb]

### Neil By Mouth

Neil Cole

With neon lights, plush leather seats and a soundtrack to match, Cabaret Voltaire's Speakeasy was the perfect venue for Neil Cole's slick act, but his routine was perhaps too cool for his audience, who only responded to a fraction of his puns. His best jokes revolved around linguistics; his bit on the etymology of the word "kangaroo" was particularly strong. At random points in the show, Neil shared meanings of the word "flush" from its "disproportionately large pool of definitions", and some fun facts about robins. This structuring of the show was cheap, gimmicky and ultimately unnecessary, since Neil's charm was in his kookiness, high energy, and non-sequitur style. The wit was there, but the delivery left something to be desired.

Cabaret Voltaire, 4 - 28 Aug (not 15, 25), 6.15pm (7.15pm), £4.00 - £8.00, fpp125. tw rating 3/5 [cld]

### Ruby Wax: Losing It

Menier Chocolate Factory

In this inspirational performance, the talented actress and comedian Ruby Wax reflects on her battle against depression and shares some insight into how she finally came to find "the manual" - to life, that is. The show started out very light-heartedly, and, like a "rollercoaster ride", gained more depth and seriousness as it progressed. Featuring jazzy song numbers performed by co-star and best friend Judith Owen, as well as humorous remarks and audience feedback towards the end, 'Losing It' was as moving as it was entertaining. It was indeed heartening to see a celebrity publicly deliberating on her problems, encouraging others to do the same without the "sense of shame" that, for too long, has been associated with mental illness.

Udderbelly's Pasture, 5 - 29 Aug (not 15), 4.10pm (5.30pm), £14.00 - £17.50, fpp145. tw rating 4/5 [mo]

### Samurai Grandma

ITO GUMI

This is a truly bizarre hour's entertainment as Shoko Ito performs her "solo super action comedy". It tells the tale of Samurai Grandma, who only gains her powers upon the death of her husband, and her battles against the evil Kitchen Penguin and his army of talking knives and vegetables. It's performed almost entirely in Japanese with English supertitles which adds to the eccentric nature of the whole thing. At times it's very funny, particularly when Shoko drags embarrassed audience members

up on stage to take part in a dance battle, but unfortunately a lot of the time it's just plain weird. Shoko's enthusiasm is infectious though, and it's very difficult not to like her. Plus, it's certainly something different!

Just The Tonic At The Caves, 4 - 28 Aug (not 17), 3.15pm (4.15pm), £6.00 - £8.00, fpp146. tw rating 3/5 [im]

## DANCE & PHYSICAL THEATRE

### Forgetting Natasha

State Of Flux / Escalator East To Edinburgh

Natasha has dementia. This powerful multimedia performance shows her attempt to scrape all of herself into a book before she forgets. Unfortunately she cannot, for the life of her, remember where she put it. The character of Natasha is sadly a little shallow - although the audience attempt to engage with the unravelling of her intricately knotted memories, it soon becomes clear that she hasn't been given much depth to undo. However, the breath-taking digital and live animation works powerfully together with the dancers who claim the stage with finesse. As they dance alongside the animation and swelling soundtrack, 'Forgetting Natasha' genuinely reaches the sublime, and it is not Natasha, but rather, the minor flaws of this production which are soon forgotten.

Zoo Southside, 6 - 27 Aug (not 10, 17, 24), 12.30pm (1.15pm), £10.00 - £12.00, fpp171. tw rating 4/5 [ls]

### Swimming With My Mother

CoisCéim Dance Theatre

With a tenderness that is only found in the relationship between mother and child, David and Madge Bolger produce a fusion of dance and physical theatre which explores familial relationships in the context of a shared passion. Supported by an overhead narrative, delivered primarily by Madge, which outlines how her love of swimming developed from a young age and was later passed on to her children, the duo perform with an ebb and flow that mirrors the rise and fall of the sea. As heart warming as it is poetic, it illustrates an evident bond of love achieved through metaphor and genuine affection in a performance that conjures up contemplative feelings of one's own nostalgia.

Dance Base, 5 - 21 Aug (not 8, 15), times vary, £7.00, fpp177. tw rating 4/5 [aq]

### Within Range

Isobel Cohen

This haunting performance is shot through with fugue-like fragments of surveillance, interrogation and torture, forming a disorientating depiction of the violence, claustrophobia and paranoia of life under the Stasi. The dance sequences are excellent: officials grasp suspects by the necks, limber spines twist and swoop, and the fragility of the body is contrasted with resilience of spirit as each delicate movement is performed with the fierce concentration of one who senses she is being watched. However, these beautiful moments are interspersed with baffling dialogue, with the result that the narrative is seemingly scrambled, encoded and frustratingly undecipherable. Whilst the precise, cryptic nature of this piece may not make for exuberant viewing, it is certainly appropriate to its subject matter.

Zoo Southside, 6 - 20 Aug (not 16), 6.10pm (7.20pm) £10.00 - £12.00, fpp179. tw rating 3/5 [ftw]

## MUSIC

#### Piaf Christine Bovill Performs Piaf

If you've ever felt shivers from hearing a musical performance, then you're half way to understanding how it feels to hear Christine Bovill sing. From 'La Vie En Rose' to 'Non, Je Ne Regrette Rien', you can almost hear the sorrow and heartache of Edith Piaf in the husky yet soaring vocals of Bovill as she transports you back to 1940s France. Between songs, Bovill speaks a bit about the background of the selected songs and how they relate to different times across Piaf's painfully short but eventful life. From her passionate performance, it is clear that Bovill strives to express the true Piaf as much as she can - something which she pulls off with exceptional sincerity.

National Library Of Scotland, 14 - 20 Aug, 7.00pm (8.00pm), £10.00 - £14.00, fpp216. tw rating 4/5 [ng]

### Jazz at Centotre

Jazzmain Trio

After a sunny afternoon perusing Fringe shows, there is nothing more relaxing than having a cocktail and listening to the Jazzmain Trio playing in the atmospheric surroundings of Centotre's main dining room. With their mixture of up-tempo hits and more melodic numbers this is a lovely live band to enjoy your dinner with - and therein lies the issue. The band are really there to play to paying dinner customers, and if you want to simply relax with a drink you will have to enjoy their dulcet tones from the bar, which doesn't exactly offer a panoramic view. If you're looking for a nice dinner accompaniment this is ideal; otherwise, another jazz offering would be preferable.

Centotre, 7, 14, 21, 28 Aug, 6.00pm (10.00pm), free, fpp208. tw rating 3/5 [ec]

### Kate Daisy Grant With Nick Pynn

Kade Daisy Grant With Nick Pynn / PBH's Free Fringe

With a wind-up toy bird as a backing singer and a toypshop of tiny, tinkling instruments to play with, eccentric chanteuse Kate Daisy Grant seems determinedly quirky. She takes you by surprise, then, with the strength and range of her voice as she surges into this set of short, sharp, bittersweet songs, infused with innocent wonder and worldly melancholy. It's a kaleidoscope of influences, moods and styles, mixing sweet, poppy hooks with sparse skiffle and tense indie edginess. Multi-instrumentalist Nick Pynn fills out the sound on violin and guitar, a resonant counterpoint and necessary anchor for Grant's mellifluous vocal. This is bombastic and beautiful music, deep, delicate and slightly demented - the perfect soundtrack for an offbeat evening.

Fingers Piano Bar, 6 - 27 Aug (not 8, 15, 22), 6.40 pm (7.40 pm), free, fpp209. tw rating 4/5 [df]

#### THEATRE

### 2401 Objects

Analogue Theatre / Oldenburgisches Staatstheater / New Wolsey Theatre / Escalator East to Edinburgh

A powerful and highly professional show. '2401 Objects' followed the true story of a young man whose severe epilepsy led doctors to try out radical forms of brain surgery which, while curing his condition, left him with total amnesia. Frayed relationships are painted with distressingly close detail; the emotionally detached tone of suburban 1950s America is inflected with a lovelessness that is very compelling. Naturalistic acting is combined with unexpected moments of polished physical theatre that are as moving as they are unexpected. The show lags in its narrative sections - they have the feeling of material that had to be wedged in somehow - and a mawkish ending is a weak coda to an otherwise forceful piece of theatre.

Pleasance Courtyard, 3 - 28 Aug (not 9, 16, 23), 4.40pm (5.55pm), £9.00 - £12.00, fpp307. tw rating 4/5 [ij]

### Beowulf - A Thousand Years Of Baggage

Banana Bag And Bodice

Beowulf wants his dragon-fight, Grendel wants his mother, and just about everybody wants to get their own back in this play about violence and vengeance that turns assumptions on their head and bulldozes through expectations. Me? I want to know where Grendel's got to: the monster has a disconcerting habit of disappearing, only to turn up later swigging beer - sometimes spewing it - somewhere in the audience. Mixing Old English with thoroughly modern diction, and swords with thumb-wars, this is high drama wonderfully combined with ridiculous comedy, not to mention great songs. It's slightly over the top in places, but this is easily forgiven when weighed against the discordant yet goosebump-giving score, admirable acting and refreshing new take on the epic poem.

Assembly George Square, 11 - 29 Aug (not 15), 4.00pm (5.10pm), £12.00 - £14.00, fpp242. tw rating 4/5 [ka]

### Chaos

ACE Productions

The lives of three women unravel before our eyes in Mika Myllyaho's grim comedy as they grapple with globalisation, the modern world and their own private passions. This is a

female 'Fight Club' meets Alexander McCall Smith, by way of women's magazines. As the women deal with their middle-class issues, egotistical passions that lurk underneath - with the help of a little alcohol - come bursting forth. Sophia is frustrated at work, Emmy's daughter is being taken from her after an act of drunken violence, and Julia is dating a married movie-lover with a split personality. Three women play all the roles, male and female, with the scenes where Julia tries to deal with her lover's two manifestations being particularly hilarious.

Pleasance Courtyard, 3 - 29 Aug (not 15), 1.50pm (3.00pm), £9.00 - £11.00, fpp248. tw rating 4/5 [rs]

### Ink

Chase The Crane

Can you love someone you've never met? Can a person ever change? Does anyone have the right to take or save a life? Playwright Lois Baldry skilfully manoeuvres through these deep questions which provoke multiple answers, but never rest conclusively on a particular one. The techniques used to show the passing of time and place are unnervingly effective at drawing the audience into the confused and lonely mind of the protagonist, Helen. The talented cast effortlessly portray the myriad effects that family trauma can have on different personalities, so one is left feeling that each jarring opinion can be completely understood, implying, perhaps, that we should grudgingly agree to disagree; a classic example of the subjectivity of morality and ethics.

C soco, 3 - 29 (not 15), 8.55pm (9.55pm), £6.50 - £9.50, fpp271. tw rating 5/5 [pr]

### Thirsty

The Paper Birds

Three toilet cubicles, two boozy British babes, and one banjo-playing techie - when I heard that this production examines Britain's obsession with drinking I was expecting a lot of shock statistics and when-binge-drinking-goes-wrong horror stories. However, The Paper Birds manage to steer clear of this to deliver an edgy and engaging show that is funny, sad, touching and thought provoking. Sometimes they manage to hit the nail right on the head and you think to yourself "I have felt Just. Like. That". This show does verge on the grotesque, but perhaps it needs to be that way in order to heighten the juxtaposition between the incredibly funny and the incredibly sad. Thoroughly modern storytelling from two very talented actresses.

Pleasance Courtyard, 3 - 28 (not 15), 5.45pm (6.45pm), £9.00 - £11.00, fpp303. tw rating 4/5 [ah]

### Sailing On

ShadyJane

If it is originality and inventiveness you seek, then 'Sailing On' is the show for you. It revolves around a girl's poignantly suppressed memory coming to light with the help of a pretend Ophelia and Virginia Woolf. Though beautifully enacted and adeptly enhanced by the use of multimedia, it was not the performance itself that most stood out, but rather, the performance space: a place "stuck between the missing and the drowned". While the space did supply a creative element to the plot, it was also the show's greatest drawback, as the audience could not shake off the feeling of discomfort that came with having to stand shoulder to shoulder in the tiny, quasi-flooded room during the long 45 minutes.

New Town Theatre, 6 - 28 Aug (not 9, 16, 23), times vary, £7.00 - £9.00, fpp295. tw rating 3/5. [ma]



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**TW RATINGS EXPLAINED: 1/5 BAD | 2/5 MEDIOCRE | 3/5 GOOD | 4/5 VERY GOOD | 5/5 BRILLIANT**