

# ThreeWeeks IN EDINBURGH

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## CHILDREN'S SHOWS

### Belt Up's 'Octavia'

Belt Up Theatre

Belt Up's foray into children's theatre has paid off; this interactive fairytale is aesthetically and physically magical. In a corner complete with grass, deck chairs and washing lines full of weird and wonderful things, the intelligent and bitter-sweet tale of Octavia's mystical journey unravels. Visually, the attention to detail is admirable and there is some inventive and intricate choreography, including a skilful sequence from the top of a piano and clever shadow puppetry. The actors are mesmerising as clowns and are musically talented, so that although the bits involving audience interaction might have been a little better crafted, this is still a multi-sensory treat and the performance flies by. Ideal for families, and an enchanting way to start the afternoon.

C soco, 4 - 30 Aug (not 25), 12.00pm (12.55pm), £5.50 - £9.50, fpp 9. [gjs]

tw rating 4/5

### The Emperor's Quest

Milk Teeth Productions

You may have already seen Milk Teeth Productions without realising it. They're the ones letting children do some painting in C's bar before their morning show (turn up early if you fancy joining in). On stage, musicians provide the soundtrack for this re-telling of a Chinese fairy tale about an Emperor on a quest to appoint an heir, and their exotically flavoured music will stretch young minds more than the performances, which are strongest in the songs (volume in dialogue is low, so sit near the front), but the kids love it when characters speak directly to them. Aimed at the younger age bracket (between four and ten years old, roughly), this show is enjoyable, but doesn't quite live up to its promise.

C, 4 - 30 Aug, 11.15am (12.05pm), £4.50 - £8.50, fpp 11. [rtw]

tw rating 3/5

## COMEDY

### Nathan Caton - Breakfast at Stephanie's

Phil McIntyre Entertainments by Arrangement With Michele Milburn at International Artists

Caton's routine is about his Grandma's disapproval of his choice to pursue a career in comedy, and it was hard not to spot the irony in the show's failure to elicit more than a handful of laughs. That's not to say it's all bad; Caton is a charming and personable storyteller, but his timing is unpredictable. Too often he failed to nail his punchlines, or spoilt his audience rapport with unexpected crudity, which was at odds with the rest of his material. Indeed, his failure to settle on a tone was perhaps the show's biggest failing. Hopefully he will tighten up over the course of the run, but for now I have to agree with Granny.

Pleasance Courtyard, 4 - 30 Aug (not 16), 9.30pm (10.30pm), £9.00 - £12.50, fpp 101. [al]

tw rating 2/5

### Jojo Sutherland Goes For The Jocular

Jojo Sutherland/The Stand Comedy Club

They say that life begins at forty; Jojo Sutherland says that all hope fades at forty. This is, essentially, the premise of this hilarious, gag-filled rant from our seemingly inebriated host. Jojo relates the pet hates that have developed as a result of being near-bankrupt, middle-aged and married with four children, and delivers her tales with such acerbic wit that the whole audience (myself included), found themselves laughing and wincing in equal measure on several occasions. It's a shame that Jojo's delivery is a bit inconsistent - proceedings lag a bit for the briefest of moments here and there - but she more than makes up for this with her unashamedly vulgar anecdotes that could mix seamlessly with the best bits of 'Grumpy Old Women'. Liable to offend, but good fun if you can stomach it.

The Stand Comedy Club III & IV, 6 - 29 Aug (not 16), 12.55pm (1.55pm), £6.00 - £7.00, fpp 80. [dc]

tw rating 3/5

### Daddy Ate All My Easter Eggs And Never Replaced Them

The Incurably Resentful Theatre Company

Disney does 'Jack The Ripper' forms the theme for the opening parody from this sketch show troupe comprising three guys and one considerably more talented female), and the show begins with the performers riffing on old classic songs from the Jungle Book to Aladdin in a deliciously macabre manner. Their opening gambit is both astonishing and amusing, but sadly the show begins to misfire soon after. Their cliché characters - such as gay 'Uncle Bender' - and the outrageously passé Scottish stereotyping result in their attempts at risqué becoming borderline offensive. The performance is saved by a musical finale that is genuinely well crafted and humorous, leaving one to wonder just how much more accomplished the show could have been entirely as a musical.

C soco, 4 - 30 Aug (not 16), 6.55pm (7.35), £6.50 - £9.50, fpp 51. [to]

tw rating 3/5

### Lights! Camera! Improvise!

The Scat Pack in Association With Hiatus Theatre

A hilarious improv show for the movie-going era: every night the Scat Pack create a new improvised movie based on audience suggestions, and the cinematic device makes the show a coherent whole, rather than the traditional series of disconnected sketches.

The performers have fun playing with the comic possibilities of pausing, rewinding and fast-forwarding the action; ballet in reverse proves a particular highlight. All the improv favourites are present: forgotten names, dodgy accents and games of one-upmanship, as performers place one another in awkward situations. At times it did lapse into laziness, especially given some of the more juvenile humour, but for the most part the performers' skill - and the show itself - was excellent.

C, 4 - 30 Aug (not 16), 6.55pm (7.55pm), £5.50 - £10.50, fpp 89. [al]

tw rating 4/5



**SNAP OF THE DAY:** The all important prop item for an open air show at the Edinburgh Fringe. Traverse show 'En Route' takes place on the streets of the city.

Photo: Kate Edwards

## DANCE AND PHYSICAL THEATRE

### Accelerate

Pure Dance

Abstract movement can be hard to process. Without any narrative or thematic context, our brains struggle to make sense of bodies flying through the air, sweeping arm gestures and athletic postures. Watching contemporary dance act 'Accelerate', I found myself sometimes mesmerised by the performers bounding across the stage, sometimes confused, and sometimes bored, mainly because the show had no coherent structure. Too often, it resembled a studio exercise in moving expressively to music, rather than a developed and meaningful piece, while the dancers' impressive grace and technical accomplishment couldn't mask the show's lack of an emotional core. With their evident talent, it's a shame that this group haven't

managed to channel their abilities into a project of real artistic vision.

C soco, 4 - 30 Aug, 4.35pm (5.25pm), £5.50 - £10.50, fpp 142. [ac]

tw rating 3/5

### Duality

Sulochana K.Sarma

The entrance of the elaborately adorned Sulochana K. Sarma commands a dramatic change in the atmosphere of the Merchants' Hall. Her presence is serene; graceful yet bold. Dancing with every inch of her being, her thousand subtleties of expression suggest that even the thoughts are dancing around inside her head. Each gesture is carefully calculated yet imbued with spontaneity, as the mere raising of a toe poignantly communicates volumes. Although we may not follow her story, nor be intended to, her engagement in it is enthralling, and

cont>>

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cont>> the colours, sights and sounds of her world are palpable. Although the performance would benefit from a more intimate space, this is a great and rare opportunity to experience classical Indian dance.

Spotlites @ The Merchants' Hall, 4 – 14 Aug, 10:15pm (11.15pm), £7.00 - £9.00, fpp 146. [hm]

tw rating 4/5

#### Duetiquette

On The Verge

In this 'dance' piece, Graham and Sally (an actor/dancer duet) present an exhibition and discussion of their collaborative extravaganza, creating in the process a brilliantly excruciating piece of fringe satire. The characters perform snippets of their imagined fringe show, peppering conversations with hideously believable pretentiousness, vacuousness and mutual loathing. Too many to list and too good to spoil, really, but these moments include an interlude where onlookers watch an empty stage for a full minute, 'imagining' Graham dancing, and another in which Graham wrestles Sally to stop her from soliloquizing so violently. Crucially, neither performer allows the piece to become completely incredible, leaving the audience constantly wondering: "should I be laughing?" – a sublime discomfort which is the grail for all realistic comedy. C soco 2, 5 - 29 Aug, 2.30pm (3.15pm), £5.50 - £10.50, fpp 146. [kb]

tw rating 4/5

#### Tabú

NoFit State

Spectacular and unique, 'Tabú' represents a feast for the senses and a true multimedia extravaganza. The cast brilliantly play out the theme 'I will be bad' by combining mischievous, melancholy and excitable characters with an infectious level of energy in a promenade performance highlighted by a live band that set the tone perfectly without ever detracting from the action. It is a devastatingly sexy show; the traditional oohhs and aahhs were accompanied by an embarrassed blush as trapeze artists tumbled their way through a love story, and couples tangoed under dimmed lights. If in doubt as to the potential of circus, buy a ticket for this, and relish the fact that it will prove all your big top stereotypes wrong.

NoFit State Circus, 4 – 30 Aug (not 10, 17, 24), times vary, £12.00 - £50.00, fpp 154. [sj]

tw rating 5/5

## JAZZ FESTIVAL

#### Orchestre National de Jazz

Edinburgh International Jazz & Blues Festival

Interpreting the songs of Billie Holiday, the French National Jazz Institution delighted the audience at the Hub last night. Or should that be re-interpreting? Because, truth be told, the songs were unrecognisable from their original form. Ian Siegal's rough and raw voice might suit the blues, but the jazz ballads of Billie Holiday were simply not the material for him and it got to point a where he actually sounded quite tuneless. Chanteuse Karen Lano was far better at imprinting herself onto the songs, in stark contrast to Siegal. The backing musicians were good but the songs suffered from a series of long, self-indulgent soloing that happened so often it seemed the fault was not the individuals, but was symptomatic of the Orchestre National.

The Hub, 2 Aug, 8.00pm (10.00pm), £15.00, jbfpp 10. [ob]

tw rating 2/5

#### Festival Of Swing

Edinburgh International Jazz & Blues Festival

On brass were Bob Wilber, Joe Temperley, Scott Hamilton, Alan Barnes, Duke Heitger and Howard Alden, and the evening's compère introduced the all-star line-up as the most 'unruly' bunch he's ever come across, but despite the occasional flashes of 'fooling around' it's difficult to see these mostly elderly gentleman causing much trouble. They and their audience grew old with jazz, and the reception the musicians received was as full-blooded as any young band might enjoy as the nine-piece celebrated the era of swinging Jazz centered on Duke Ellington; it was fitting that Joe Temperley, a veteran who actually played alongside Ellington, was there. Highlights included 'Creole Love Song', Heitger's trumpet solos and Alden spicing things up with some Brazilian swing. A gently foot-tapping evening Queens Hall, 3 Aug, 8.00pm (10.30pm), £17.50-£22.50, jbpp 12. [rtw]

tw rating 3/5

#### Eric Alexander

Edinburgh International Jazz & Blues Festival

The pace of the night was set in the first bar when Eric Alexander crashed into a torrential version of Cheesecake by Dexter Gordon, and it wasn't the only time Long Tall Dexter's influence would be heard at the gig. It was a night of interactions, and the star-studded line-up included Alyn Cosker on drums and, on piano, a particularly vivacious Brian Kellock, whose exchanges with Alexander were fiery and full of pace and imagination. Cosker laid some phenomenal solos as well and Alexander, who seemed used to being the engine of a quartet, soon found out he was one of three on stage. Apart from his comically elaborate 'pastel' outros he handled it well, which made for a kinetic masterclass.

The Lot, 2 Aug, 9.00pm (11.00pm), £16.00, jbfpp 11. [tb]

tw rating 4/5

#### Emile Parisien Quartet

Edinburgh International Jazz & Blues Festival

A flurry of jagged notes. A crashing piano. A twitchy French front-man. In the first few moments, the performance seemed to confirm the stereotype of jazz pretentiousness. The music was designed to explore, experiment and provoke; the compositions were complex and the players undoubtedly fine, but you got the feeling they were enjoying themselves a bit too much as they delved repeatedly into broken rhythms and obscure musical references. Despite impressive improvisations and the odd groove, there were few concessions to the audience and, perversely, the encore was the highlight - a taut, tense track built on Emile's staccato Sax and Ivan Gelugne's brooding Bass solo. If you can stick with it, you'll find more than self-satisfied instrument-massage; but not much more.

Voodoo Rooms, 3 Aug, 8.30pm (10.40pm), £10.00, jbfpp 13. [df]

tw rating 2/5

#### Niki King

Edinburgh International Jazz & Blues Festival

This was an evening about Billie Holiday, but more than that it was an evening about Niki King's love of Billie Holiday; a sincere, earnest love that permeated through to a spellbound audience at The Hub. This talented, stunning chanteuse – supported by a truly superb backing band comprising Paul Harrison (piano), Euan Burton (double bass) and Doug Hough (drums) – offered a nuanced and affecting display; tender in the laments, and powerful in the ballads. At times King seemed on the verge of tears as she sang with the tragic violent history of Holiday, a history writ large in her lyrics, surely in her thoughts. Billie Holiday was a beautiful and dignified woman, and Niki King's performance mirrored that perfectly.

The Hub, 3 Aug, 8.30pm (10.30pm), £15.00, jbfpp 13. [ab]

tw rating 5/5

## THEATRE

#### Stitching

Sell a Door Theatre Company

The shock and chill brought on by 'Stitching's scenes of eroticised domestic abuse, masochistic grief and vicious acts of sexual symbolism are still felt by Edinburgh audiences a decade after its premiere, and Sell a Door tackle the script with ambition and strength. The emotional demands made by the two roles are weighty and the actors, though young, show promising fortitude and maturity as they tackle the young couple's descent into neurosis and disaster. I did wish occasionally for more conviction from the actors and the piece as a whole, which sometimes lacked the necessary muscle and vitriol to back up the brutal content and keep the play from seeming shallow or crass, but this is otherwise a very competent production.

C soco 3, 5 - 15, 17 - 30 Aug, 9.55pm (10.55pm), £7.50 - £10.50, fpp 291. [kb]

tw rating 3/5

#### See You Jimmy

Theatre Alba

It's not often you get literally labelled as a 'SICKO' with a sticky piece of paper, but this simple action prepares you for a surprising and touching exploration of the stigma still associated with mental illness. Devised by service users of Tynepark Mental Health Resource Centre in Haddington, with the help of a few professional actors, 'See You Jimmy' is performed in idyllic Duddingston, almost in the shadow of Arthur's Seat. The

script moves through educative game shows and poetry readings, before culminating in a deeply affecting sequence, and the warm community audience enriches the atmosphere. Never worthy or sanctimonious, this piece displays a genuine personal connection with its subject matter. Ideally, this kind of work would take place nationwide.

Duddington Kirk Manse Marquee, 3 – 7 August, 12.30pm (1.20pm), £4.00 - £6.00, fpp 286. [tm]

tw rating 4/5

#### Poem Without A Hero

Inside Intelligence

Her first husband was shot, her second husband died in Stalin's camps. Her son spent years in the very same camps. So, don't expect a lot of sweetness and light when you go to see this dramatisation of Anna Akhmatova's poem. Holly Strickland owns the role of Anna from the moment she begins to welcome guests to what seems to be a metaphysical New Year's Eve party; her commanding performance seems all the more stunning given that she stepped into the role only days before the opening, when the original actress bowed out for personal reasons. This is a must-see for fans of Anna Akhmatova, as the difficult poem comes alive when delivered with Shakespearean intensity by the gifted Strickland.

C Chambers Street, 04 – 30 Aug (not 17, 24), 3:15pm, £6.50 - £9.50, fpp 280. [sl]

tw rating 3/5

#### A Midsummer Night's Madness

Hackney Empire presents Hackney-Harlem Theatre Company with Andy Jordan Productions

A magical mixture where hip hop meets Shakespeare, this is a joyous relocation of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' to central London, with slick beats, slicker dance moves and a healthy sprinkling of urban fairy dust. There are several inspired additions: Bottom is an energetic traffic warden (whose rendition of 'All The Single Ladies' is more convincing than Liza Minelli's), and Titania is played by three actresses simultaneously, who slink sinuously through the sparkly graffiti-strewn set while their fairy minions creep about their feet. Some of the modern rewording and song lyrics are a little clunky, occasionally obscuring the story rather than clarifying it, but the verve of the performances ensures this production is Hackney-ed without being hackneyed.

C, 4 - 30 Aug (not 16), 5.00pm (6.15pm), £7.50 - £10.50, fpp 272. [gg]

tw rating 4/5

#### Lip Service

Becki Gerrard

Punctuated by grainy home videos and music, Becki Gerrard's unique narration tells of how the lives and loves of past generations have shaped her entire being. This deeply personal reflection on being a child and sibling carefully uses the naked body to highlight who we really are underneath it all. While the multimedia aspects only work when they flow seamlessly with the monologue, the long, defined pauses as Becki brews and drinks tea provide a valuable opportunity for the audience to reflect. Although autobiographical, her honest observations of family life strike a chord in our own memories, forcing us to look closely at our own histories, so that we leave quietly contemplating on this moving, memorable and gutsy performance.

C soco, 4 - 27 Aug (not 25, 26), 5.55pm (6.50pm), £6.50 - £9.50, fpp 267. [lj]

tw rating 3/5

#### The Fastest Woman Alive

Pepperdine University

Jackie Cochran was the first woman to break the sound barrier, amongst other things – conventions, glass ceilings and a goodly number of balls. Her life story is enshrined in this sprawling play by Karen Sunde, enacted by the Pepperdine University Theatre Department. Unfortunately, it falls into a trap of biographical theatre, attempting to cram so many ideas, characters and inspirations that it rockets through 30-odd years with such pace that it becomes amusing in its attempts to meaningfully portray both Jackie's struggle against prejudice and her most important relationships. Only Zach Sandberg as Chuck Yeager gives a compelling performance. Smooth execution and some lovely singing don't save this show from being a little laughable in its earnestness.

C, 4 - 14 Aug, 12.10pm (1.25pm), £6.50 - £9.50, fpp 249. [ve]

tw rating 2/5

#### The Cure

Cambridge University ADC

It started with a kiss, then some soul/sexuality searching, all topped off with mime. Billed as a comedy/drama, this is a play about two twenty-somethings finding themselves, with comic relief provided by the supporting characters. The acting is commendable and some interesting issues are explored, but the plot seems confused and the heightened, poetic language used in some sections jars with the naturalistic style of the piece. There are good moments, such as a lovely father and son scene and some dry, original comedy, but the play is hindered by a ridiculous amount of props, a pointless paint-balling section and an extremely obscure ending. I wouldn't rush out to see this, but it wouldn't be a complete waste of an hour.

C soco, 4 – 27 (not 16), 3.30pm (4.25pm), £6.50 - £9.50, fpp 240. [sk]

tw rating 2/5

#### Anatomy Act

Negative Capability

Freddy Syborn and his Brain Chorus are looking for answers, but all they get is more questions. This is self-analysis for the Google generation: exploring the workings of the mind and the universe, 'Anatomy Acts' features searing emotional narratives flavoured with the comedy of self-deprecation and rude slapstick, combining a scholarly fascination with words and a schoolboy obsession with tits. Although it can sometimes feel like a lecture, the unwavering virtuosity of the cast prevents the play from losing focus, even as too many factual tangents threaten to spoil the broth. This ensemble of unique voices delivers Syborn's magnificent, heart-felt and at times poetic confessions with great force, leaving you reeling from such uninhibited honesty.

C soco, 4 – 30 Aug, 6.40pm (7.40pm), £8.50 - £10.50, fpp 225. [cnm]

tw rating 4/5

#### Bang Bang You're Dead

The Red Chair Players West

"I wanted to kill you. But I didn't want you dead". This emotive exploration of the Columbine shootings attempts to explore and understand how a boy can become a killer. Josh – in a forceful lead performance - is tortured by the memories of his victims killed in the high school rampage. Moving fluently between childhood memories and flashbacks to the killings, there are some powerful moments (his victims slowly unravel red ribbons when they are shot and make ghostly use of torches), but the play fails to convincingly evoke the world it attempts to condemn, in a production where a strong lead is counterbalanced by a mixed chorus. 'Bang Bang You're Dead' is intelligent and thought-provoking, but won't blow you away.

C, 4 – 13 Aug, 3.40pm (4.30pm), £6.50 - £9.50, fpp 229. [mm]

tw rating 3/5

#### Doctor Faustus

Cambridge University ADC

Convincing and captivating to watch, John Faustus is the appropriateynchpin of this naturalistic version of Marlowe's famous play. He is played beautifully by Benjamin Blyth, who creates immense tension, pathos and intrigue without music, sound, or complex lighting. Unfortunately, the self-conscious direction of the spirits punctuates this atmosphere with cumbersome movements that weaken what is otherwise a compelling play. On stage throughout the production, their presence isn't necessary and often detracts focus away from the centralised action. Brief moments of brilliance are present in scenes such as those in Rome, but their groaning is all too reminiscent of 'The Muppets Christmas Carol' to be in any way spooky. However this is still worth a watch, if only to witness the mesmerising performance of its morally dubious protagonist.

C, 4 - 30 Aug (not 16), 7.45pm (8.45.pm) £7.50 - £10.50, fpp 246. [sh]

tw rating 3/5

#### Down The Rabbit Hole

The Lincoln Company

This intriguing re-imagining of 'Alice in Wonderland' by Lincoln University students explores the relationship between Alice and her creator, Lewis Carroll, in a subtle and engaging story that wonderfully captures that moment when girls become young women. Set during one evening when Carroll is writing the novel into the early hours, the play merges the real world with the novel's

world, with the young Alice finding herself in the Wonderland of the March Hare and the Cheshire Cat. While some sections, particularly the Mad Hatter's tea party, felt a little strained, moments in the real world between Alice and Carroll really worked. There is a powerful ending as they both realise, perhaps too late, that Alice is growing up.

C soco, 4 - 30 Aug, 12.05pm (12.55pm), £6.50 - £9.50, fpp 247. [ef]

tw rating 3/5

#### Stripped

Honest Arts & Scamp Theatre

Looking around the room, it occurred to me that some of the audience might have been hoping to see a strip show: instead they saw a humorous and at times sentimental show about working in a strip club, and by the end the audience were not disappointed. 'Stripped' is written and performed by one woman, Hannah Chalmers, who mercurially shifts from one character to another, including a hilarious Russian stripper and the club's seedy Scottish manager. Chalmers' characterisations are superb, and as she endows each person with their own distinctive physicality, she completely holds the viewer's attention, easily maintaining the audience's interest for the full hour. Don't expect a strip show but do expect to be entertained and moved.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, 4 - 30 Aug (not 16), 4.15pm (5.15pm), £5.00 - £10.00, fpp 292. [cc]

tw rating 4/5

#### The Second Star to the Right

Paper's Weight in Association With Belt Up Theatre

Wending your way through C soco's labyrinthine stairways is an apt precursor to this wistful, oddly enchanting production. As you wait for the show to begin, you are snatched from the corridor - one of the Lost Boys takes your hand, leading you into Neverland - to be seated on an array of mismatched chairs and cushions strewn across the floor. Once the nostalgic stories of childhoods long forgotten begin, however, clunky dialogue and oddly balletic dancing slightly mars the play's early promise, although the minimal use of props really evokes the image of children playing at pretend. While the stories are not as engaging as they could be, the melancholy mood is very affective. Although it doesn't achieve its full potential, the whole is definitely greater than the sum of the parts.

C soco, 4 – 30 Aug (not 25), 3.00pm (3.55pm), £7.50 - £10.50, fpp 286. [al]

tw rating 3/5

#### The Trojan Women

Working Girls

Occasionally a youth theatre piece emerges that puts adults to shame. Working Girls may not shame anyone, but the mix of maturity and vitality in their production of Euripides' seminal script is commendable. The play, imagining the struggles of the surviving women after the fall of Troy, has been well adapted: it reaches the pinnacle of poignancy, then concludes before risking stagnation. Perhaps it relies too much on bedraggling applications of hair spray to illustrate social turmoil, and sometimes the dense dialogue could be complemented by simpler physical movements. Yet, the movements are well crafted, and the musical performances simply sublime. The design deliberately resists a simple re-hashing, and the potential and promise in these young players is staggering.

C soco, 4 – 14 Aug, 5.45pm (7.00pm), £6.50 - £9.50, fpp 299. [np]

tw rating 4/5

## THREEWEEKS IN EDINBURGH

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