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CHILDREN'S SHOWS

React! Impro for Kids C theatre

Whilst this show is reasonably entertaining, there are probably better improv shows to catch this month. Attired in paint box bright t-shirts and wearing perpetual cheesy smiles, C theatre's players are like bouncy children's television presenters. However, although they're charming enough, it all feels rather average, uninspiring and jaded. The show consists of various standard improv games concocted from audience suggestions, mixed together with some fancy dress fun, but the performers occasionally struggle to sustain the games for very long and some parts are rather unimaginative and underwhelming. There's nothing glaringly wrong with the show's format or performers, and it makes for a mildly amusing 45 minutes, but the kids will forget about it the moment you walk through the exit.

C, 4 - 30 Aug (not 16), 1.15pm (2.00pm), £4.50 - £8.50, fpp 17. [gjs]

tw rating 2/5

Norman Shadowboxer Empty Box Theatre

"Think inside the box, not outside the box" is the somewhat patronisingly delivered, and altogether confusing, moral of this otherwise enchanting tale. Norman is a life-size cardboard puppet, grappling with a deadly mosquito in his office, his struggle mirrored by an imagined boxing match. The set of this fun tale is its great strength, capturing the audience's imaginations as empty boxes are transformed to shadow puppet theatres, typewriters and lunchboxes. The humour too, is accessible for both children and parents, with Norman's parents being a particular highlight. However, the restriction of telling the entire story in rhyme, coupled with the decision to depict all the characters with bizarre French accents, limits an otherwise charming piece.

C Aquila, 5 - 22 Aug, 11.05am (11.45am), £4.50 - £8.50, fpp 16. [lvs]

tw rating: 3/5

COMEDY

For 21 Nights Only

Cloud Comedy/ PBH's Free Fringe

Perhaps the people who crowded into this small pub really did have a burning desire to discover some of the, shall we say, lesser known talent at the fringe. My bet is that they just turned up because it was free. Gigs like this are a real testing-ground for up-and-coming comedians, and can make or break the inexperienced performer. Definitely break, in the case of some of the acts tonight, whose jokes fell flatter than a pancake that had been steamrollered, although posh Rosie Wilkes provided an enjoyable headline set. Come to 'For 21 Nights Only' to watch comedians cut their teeth before they hit the big time - or fade back into obscurity, as the case may be.

The White Horse, 7 - 28 Aug (not 19), 6.30pm (7.25pm), free, fpp 63. [ac]

tw rating 2/5



SNAP OF THE DAY: Invisible Dot's story-telling phone boxes are open for business! Check them out at Pleasance, Bristo Square, South Bridge and George Street. Photo: David Haggerton

Josie Long: Be Honourable!

Just The Tonic

Josie Long's stand-up is like breakfast in bed: a delicious treat wreathed in sunshine. Described as "a ramshackle call-to-arms", this is in fact an intelligent, tightly-structured set about what she has been up to since not coming to Edinburgh last year: talking to strangers, searching for role models, and learning to love porridge. She presents an hour of whimsical flourishes skilfully blended with political savvy, and illustrated with her trademark endearing drawings. Long has always had ebullience and charm: with this wise, clever and utterly delightful show she proves that she can back all of this up with comedic maturity. Long may she continue to light up audiences with her radiant credo of kindness and conscientiousness.

Just the Tonic at the Caves, 5 - 29 Aug (not 17, 22, 23), 7.40pm (8.50pm), £8.00 - £9.00, fpp 82. [gg]

tw rating 5/5

Toulson And Harvey Used To Be Friends

Pleasance

In a diverse and entertaining show, the reformed Toulson & Harvey made light of their 2007 split, Jesus and their PG rating. A mixture of sketches and musical numbers, the show asked vital questions such as why Justin Lee Collins is still on TV, and why isn't Michael Barrymore isn't: as the audience started singing along with lyrics expressing the hope that Collins will be caught looking at child pornography, it became clear their PG rating was a joke in itself. The show was slightly disjointed, and lines were missed here

and there, but this contributed to a gloriously funny, Monty Python-esque series of surreal sketches.

Pleasance Courtyard, 4 - 30 Aug (not 16), 5.10pm (6.10pm), £8.00, fpp 135. [amb]

tw rating 4/5

Your Mum

Vinegar Knickers

Performing to an unresponsive audience, Vinegar Knickers did well to extract the number of laughs they did. These three young ladies are clearly talented writers, and their material suggested a maturity belying their tender years. Of course, there were some misses (the over-sexed mother concept was overused, drawing only perfunctory applause second time round), and some of their material took an age to reach the punchline, by which time the audience's loss of interest was palpable. Their physical comedy was excellent, however, the writing intelligent, and sketches such as their fitness fanatics one wouldn't seem out of place on TV. There could be a bright future for 'Your Mum'. Yeah, you heard me...

C soco, 4-30 Aug (not 16), 2.30pm (3.20pm), prices vary, fpp 141. [amb]

tw rating 3/5

Mark Allen's Go Slow

Best Medicine Management

"Czech composer, six letters, anyone?" Sitting in an armchair with the Guardian crossword, asking the audience for help with clues, Mark Allen sets the tone for his show

from the start: laid back and middle class. His gentle, family-friendly stand-up routine describes his 'Go Slow', a month in which he espoused the internet, mobile phones and digital cameras as part of a personal crusade against our society's frantic need for speed. He's a witty and perceptive story-teller, even if his observations are a little London-centric. Providing a compelling commentary on today's accelerated lifestyle, Allen's entertaining show contains a valuable message for all those of us who can't keep our eyes off the clock.

The GRV, 5 - 29 Aug (not 18), 4.40pm (6.10pm), £5.00, fpp 94. [ac]

tw rating 3/5

The Rupert Pupkin Collective

Gilded Balloon

There are countless styles and genres of improv on offer at the Fringe, but these gents don't waste their time with any gimmicks. Their brand of improv comedy is classic, simple: members of the audience shout out suggestions, which the performers then use to make them laugh. It's not rocket science, but then it doesn't need to be with comedians as talented as these. With the scenes coming thick and fast, sometimes just one word or a look is enough to send the audience into hysterics. Clearly having as much fun on stage as we are off, these guys are like the coolest uncles in the world after a couple of sherries - properly funny!

Gilded Balloon Teviot, 6 - 18 Aug (not 9, 16), 5.00pm (6.00pm), £9.00 - £12.00, fpp 118. [ij]

tw rating 4/5

TWELFTH NIGHT

Shakespeare's classic case of mistaken identity, gender confusion, love lost and found.

4-30 Aug (not 16)
2.15pm (1hr10)

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