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CHILDREN'S SHOWS

Mr Boom

One man band Mr Boom lands in the Famous Spiegeltent from his home on the moon to feverish excitement from a crowd of young children and parents. He is kindly and endearing, and the audience, who are mainly devoted fans, sing along to gentle yet witty tunes about runaway trains and how you 'canna'e shove your granny off the bus'. Playful interactive touches are effective, proving the simplest ideas are often best; children spin and fall like whirligigs and autumn leaves, then form a human train whilst their parents form archways for them to run through. The music may be an acquired taste for those unfamiliar with his style, but this is appealing cosmic revelry for younger kids.

The Famous Spiegeltent, dates vary, 11.00am (12.00pm), £7.00, fpp 14. [gjs]

tw rating 4/5



COMEDY

Adam Hills Mess Around

Off The Kerb Productions

It may seem insane for a comic to scrap his material and surrender to almost a full hour of improvisation inspired by his audience. But in insanity lies creativity, and in creativity lies genius, and Edinburgh veteran Adam Hills is perhaps the one man who could pull off such a feat. Thanks to a brilliant back-story about his appearance at the Royal Variety Show in 2009, and helped in no small way by 10-year-old Lenny (a stand-up star of the future, no doubt), tonight's show redefined the boundaries of audience interaction.

In one hour he managed to unite nations, shatter taboos and promote his exciting and innovative charity campaign. Go. This man is awe-inspiring.

Assembly @ Assembly Hall, 5 - 29 Aug (not 9, 16, 23), 7.00pm (8.00pm), £10.00 - £14.00, fpp 21. [ajb]

tw rating 5/5

Cannonball - Free

Cannonball/PBH's Free Fringe

The Beehive Inn is buzzing (sorry, I couldn't resist) with excitement for Cannonball's improvised comedy. The compère bounds around the stage like an eager but vacant puppy, then the performers enter. They're a dynamic and intuitive group, and have several hilarious games, such as one involving two separately motivated spin doctors compiling a speech for a confused politician. Other material relies on standard improv exercises and audience participation, and it frequently seems to lack the momentum and spontaneity needed to give it uniqueness. Yet, whilst the show lacks the drive to make it exceptional, there are few better ways to immerse yourself in the Fringe than improvised comedy, and Cannonball offer a fine chance to give it a go.

Beehive Inn, 7 - 28 Aug (not 16, 23), 2.30pm (3.30pm), free, fpp 40. [np]

tw rating 3/5

SNAP OF THE DAY: Loretta Maine leaves the Caves to lead a Fringe protest against Edinburgh's year round joke, the long in development tram system. Photo: Kate Edwards

Free Until Famous With Lewis Schaffer

John Fleming Presents

Lewis Schaffer, as he points out, looks exactly like the kind of guy you'd expect to be a famous comedian. But he isn't one... and this is the shtick his comedy is built around. That, and having an opinion on everywhere in the world. And being bitter about his ex-wife. And dealing with self-loathing and a Jewish mother (possibly related). This shtick is funny, but is a comedy archetype. Nonetheless, Lewis is very personable, the belly laughs abound and he even manages to coax laughter from a poker-faced German in the front row. Much of the set is spontaneous, and it's delightful to see someone working a room without relying on carefully rehearsed script.

Laughing Horse @ The Counting House, 5 - 29 Aug, 7.30pm (8.30pm) (amended time), free (non-ticketed), fpp 64. [ve]

tw rating 3/5

Jay Foreman: Pretend You're Happy

Jay Foreman

There's no need to pretend as there is plenty to enjoy in this hilarious stand-up show. Jay Foreman pleases with a set of catchy tunes complete with witty lyrics, and when he isn't singing, he's churning out laugh-out-loud jokes aplenty. The subject matters of his jokes and songs cover lots of ground, as topics as diverse as calypso drinks and botched bank robberies are explored, and the laughs are near-constant. His interaction with the audience was jovial, relaxed and utterly engaging: I was kept solidly entertained from beginning to end, and I could tell that the vast

majority of the audience felt the same. In time, Jay Foreman will go far, so it's best to catch him in Edinburgh while you can.

Underbelly, Cowgate, 5 - 29 Aug (not 18), 1.40pm (2.40pm), £6.00 - £10.00, fpp 76. [dc]

tw rating 4/5

Mould & Arrowsmith in 3D

Oh, the painful irony of a show all about technology where there's an invasive technical glitch for the first fifteen minutes. 'Mould and Arrowsmith in 3D' relies a great deal on geeky gimmickry, and for a while the dweeby duo seemed thwarted; Mould handled the situation with blithe good humour, whilst Arrowsmith plastered a tight smile on her face and seemed terrified by the mechanical mess-up. When all was set right, the couple delivered a series of gently amusing, shamelessly nerdy sketches, which were wildly varied in quality. They're an endearingly dorky pairing, however, and if you're a disciple of Steve Jobs there are enough guffaws to warrant checking them out. In geek-reference terms: Mostly harmless.

Pleasance Courtyard, 4 - 29 Aug (not 10, 17), 4.30pm (5.30pm), £8.00 - £9.00, fpp 100. [kc]

tw rating: 3/5 stars

Addicted to Danger! McNeil & Pamphilon

Steve McNeil and Sam Pamphilon have that rare thing in an male double act: a woman. Rachel Stubbings delivers a master-class in deadpan, brilliantly undercutting any potential penile pomposity: the dynamic between the three of them is a comic treat. They tackle a number of taboo topics - Jesus, terrorism, rape, race - but always in a disarmingly good-

natured way. Their jokes about form (as in the catchy ditty 'We're Writing a Comedy Song') are clever whilst remaining accessible. It's a mark of confidence not to crave the constant validation of laugh after laugh, and it is in the longer-drawn out sketches, such as the game of 'Name that Film', that this hugely enjoyable duo reveal their comedic maturity.

Pleasance Dome, 5 - 29 Aug (not 16), 5.00pm (5.55pm), £5.50 - £7.00, fpp 22. [gg]

tw rating: 4/5

DANCE AND PHYSICAL THEATRE

Pas Perdus Les Argonautes

It would be near impossible not to be charmed by the eccentricity of this beautifully physical and beautifully visual piece of theatre. Four musically talented artisan clowns wearing what look like straight-jackets invite us into a timeless world where they cavort with giant wooden blocks like over-sized Jenga pieces. Each clown endears with his own distinctive comic character and displays remarkable physical virtuosity, imbuing every movement with emotional significance. While Pas Perdus is a highly original display of circus skill which all the family will enjoy, it is also more than that. It is a tale of collaborative creativity and fruitful non-conformity. We are shown rigid patterns of life replaced by joyful experiment and delightful anarchy.

Zoo Southside, 6 - 30 Aug (not 22, 23), 2.20pm (3.30pm), £12.00 - £9.00, fpp 152. [dp]

tw rating 4/5

C aquila 5-30 Aug (not 17) at 8:50pm

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COMEDY CENTRAL

Still

Smallpetiklein Dance Company

Choreographically intense and evocative, each element of this show, from the visual to the sound, reflects the theme of war. The powerful soundtrack, rich with sound effects - sometimes relentless, sometimes strident - effectively supports the performance of the four dancers, whose movements explore and challenge the dynamics of space, particularly in relation to the floor. The effective use of contact improvisation within the duet sequences opens contemporary dance up to new possibilities of movement. However, the decision to end with the short video "Thinking out loud" seems out of joint with the rest of the show. Furthermore, the film itself is rather self-celebratory and leaves the audience feeling perplexed.

Zoo Southside, 6 - 14 Aug, 12.40 pm (1.10 pm), £8.00 - £10.00, fpp 154. [ga]
tw rating 3/5

The Vanishing Horizon

Idle Motion

Red rope, feathers, helium balloons and lots and lots of suitcases. This innovative and interesting physical piece is an almost perfect example of theatrical ingenuity; the clever use of suitcases as part of the set highlighted the aviation theme of this show about love, life and death. This visually stunning aesthetic is backed up by a humorous and competent script, which keeps the audience thoroughly entertained, while the use of lights was particularly exciting in further exploring the theme of flight and adventure throughout the ages. Finally, the use of electric fans added an extra dimension, resulting in a beautiful and emotional ending. Although the costumes could have been more imaginative, this is only a tiny flaw in an entertaining show.

The Zoo, 6 - 27 Aug (not 17.24), 6.00pm (6.50pm), £6.00 - £8.00, fpp 155. [sj]
tw rating 4/5

Anatomy Of Fantasy

Do Theatre

A mixture of physical theatre and contemporary dance, 'Anatomy of Fantasy' is totally baffling, but violently impressive. The demanding physical score provides incredible stage-images, and the tactile choreography occasionally approaches the sublime, as when the dancers dive under string and whirl scythes around. An early sequence of furious rolls, slides and lifts is a particular highlight, showcasing some exhilarating ensemble work and liquid physicality. It's not perfect, though: the slower sections fail to supply tension, it's a little prop-heavy, and the imagery is tryingly obvious. There's some awful video projection, but the live musical accompaniment with flamenco percussion brings the audience back on side. As subtle as a brick, but as thrilling as throwing said brick through a window.

Assembly @ George Street, 5 - 29 Aug (not 17), 5.25pm (6.25pm), £11.00 - £13.50, fpp 142. [tm]
tw rating 4/5

MUSICALS AND OPERA

The Singalong Glee Club

David Benson & Stewart Nicholls - Festival Highlights
What's that chaps? A tea-time sing-song, you say? Well, why the dickens not! More Jeeves and Wooster than McKinley High, the talented David Benson and Stewart Nicholls return 'Glee' to its music hall roots, sharing a thought or two on its history along the way. Offering an hour of cheeky, energetic sing-a-long tunes, this is just the tonic for weary festival-goers. Think Brighton beach meets World War Two bomb shelter. Participation is never forced, simply charmingly irresistible - a willing audience of all ages belting out everything from 'Knees Up Mother Brown' to the Cornetto song. Splendid, ivory-tinkling entertainment [comedy vegetable songs included]. Do take your auntie, and don't be surprised if you're the one to get all Julie Andrews.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, 7 - 30 Aug (not 18, 25), 5.00pm (6.15pm), £5.00 - £11.00, fpp 218. [es]
tw rating 4/5

Maxina Todd NVQ

Flat Pack Theatre Productions

I cringe at saying so, but 'Maxina Todd NVQ' is almost so bad that it's good. This 'modern musical Sweeney Todd' follows a barbarous beautician as she turns her parlour into a processing plant for pies. It's undoubtedly low brow stuff, but I found myself grinning

idiocytically at the plot's gruesomely absurd developments. The jokes and lyrics are by turns surprisingly clever and laugh-out-loud awful; 'Lenny Lovett's Puffy Pies' is campy, catchy, and quite a dexterous number. The cast are game, and while the performances and vocals aren't exactly impressive, they can't really be faulted either. A flimsy, over-designed set adds to the hilarity. It's free, it's funny, it'll be far better when you're drunk... it's Fringe!

Laughing Horse @ The Counting House, 5 - 18 Aug, 12.30am (1.40am), free (non-ticketed), fpp 270. [tm]
tw rating 3/5

Desire 2Landa

The plot of this musical is a confusing, ridiculous mess. For a play described as comedy, one would expect audience members to laugh, which they did not, because the jokes are embarrassing clichés. The attempts at drama, meanwhile, fall flat. The music, ranging from Polka fusion to Broadway showstoppers, includes several very catchy tunes. It is the cast, however, that saves this show: my, oh my, when they break into a big song and dance number, they absolutely electrify the stage. So, when they suddenly start singing about a 'scandal,' don't get too concerned that you have no idea what they're referring to; sit back and enjoy this sizzling ensemble, and hope that someday they're given material worthy of their talent.

New Town Theatre, 05 - 29 Aug (not 17), 8.00pm (9.15pm), £7.50 - £12.00, fpp 210. [sl]
tw rating 3/5

Teen Bewitched

Propera/Opera

This company of young professionals offers a clever updated take on Ravel's 'L'enfant Et Les Sortileges'. The teenage protagonist flounces and pouts convincingly, throwing strops at her mother and dumping boyfriends on a whim until she is visited by a series of visions which show her the error of her ways. The libretto is fresh and modern, and although the venue's acoustics do the singers no favours, it is generally well sung and features a few really beautiful voices, particularly that of the Shepherd. While the acting could have been stronger in places and explored the darker aspects of the piece more, its comic elements are brought out well. A strong, refreshing look at chamber opera.

theSpaces @ Surgeons Hall, 7 - 13 Aug, 1.10pm (1.55pm), £8.00 - £10.00, fpp 220. [jm]
tw rating 4/5

THEATRE

My Name Is Bill

Amerrycan Theatre

With hindsight, we realise that the decision Bill Wilson is struggling to make in this hotel lobby will change the fate of millions of people. For now though all we see is one man, fallen from great heights, agonising whether to take a sip of a G&T and die, or resist the urge and live. Bill Wilson, portrayed with great sensitivity by Bryan Bounds, was the co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous. As we discover how he reached that place, music transports us to the parties of the roaring twenties that led to the depression - both personal and Great - of the thirties. It is an engaging performance, revealing much about a man whose greatness was of doubt only to himself.

theSpaces on the Mile @ The Radisson, 6 - 15 Aug (not 8), 11.45am (12.50pm), £5.00 - £6.00, fpp 273. [jj]
tw rating 3/5

Poland 3 Iran 2

30 Bird Productions/Escalator East to Edinburgh

Watching this excellent show gave me the sort of feeling you get when you open a time capsule [or see them open one on 'Blue Peter']. The format is simple: performers Chris Dobrowolski and Mehrdad Seyf sit their audience down in a pub and talk about family, football, and the 1976 match between Poland and Iran that fascinated them both as children. Accompanying the anecdotes is a slideshow that allows us a look into their old sticker collections, photo albums and garden sheds. Seyf and Dobrowolski are extremely charismatic and this is a wry and charming slice of secret history, a must for anyone who's ever traced back a family tree or idolised a footballer.

Pleasance at Thistle Street Bar, 4 - 28 Aug (not 9, 10, 16, 23), 5.00pm (5.50pm), £5.00 - £10.00, fpp 280. [crc]
tw rating 4/5

While You Lie

Traverse Theatre Company

Sam Holcroft's bruising new play is at once alienating and deeply moving. Female bodies are disfigured and dissected, used as sexual bargaining tokens, and cut apart on kitchen tables, while men assert their primitive, perverted urges over them. The characters are archetypes - the sexy secretary, the leery boss, the jealous wife, the disturbing charity worker-cum-plastic surgeon. Yet however grotesque they become, they are played with compassion and humanity, making them all the more unsettling to watch. Pauline Knowles' descent into baby food-eating mania is especially upsetting, and Claire Lams is magnificently fragile as Ana. By the end, the stage was spattered with liquid and dismembered chicken, testament to a stage massacre that is unbearable and unforgettable.

Traverse Theatre, 5 - 29 Aug (not 9, 16, 23), times vary, £6.00 - £17.00, fpp 304. [gg]
tw rating: 5/5

'Misconception' by Bill Dare

Jeremy Meadow

Louise wants a baby. Her husband, Jimmy, doesn't. And as for their best friend, Noel? He wants food. This is the basis for this intermittently funny play, in which Louise desperately tries to convince Jimmy to be a father. Noel, meanwhile, acts as a comical go-between for the couple, but often ends up making matters worse. I was interested to see how this play would end, as my own [pardon the pun] preconceptions were constantly turned on their head; it did take slightly too long to reach its conclusion, however, and probably would have worked better without what felt like an unneeded third Act. All-in-all, this is an interesting play that is worthy of attention.

Assembly @ George Street, 5 - 30 Aug (not 9 or 23), 3.35pm (4.55pm), £5.00 - £13.50, fpp 272. [dc]
tw rating 3/5

Broken Voices

Beacon Theatre Group

This 'Lord of the Flies' style glimpse into the inner workings of frustrated teenagers' minds presents one of the youngest casts I have seen at a Fringe show. They handled the dark content of the piece with a great deal of confidence and style, and it was clear to the audience that each performer was thoroughly enjoying their time on stage. Despite this, the plot of the piece was weak and confused: characters didn't have enough time to develop and the storyline was tenuous. It is uncomfortable to see a story in which so much violence is inflicted on young children, but overall, the piece itself was an interesting and creative reflection on childhood issues showcasing a promising pool of talent.

The Vault, 8 - 14 Aug, times vary, £5.00 - £6.00, fpp 234. [sj]
tw rating 3/5

The Fragility of X

Cool

This harrowing piece follows the struggles of a single mother, and her autistic teenager. The two main performances are praiseworthy: the walrus-like bellowing of the son creates an uncomfortable environment, which concurrently increases the overwhelming pathos for the mother and her hardships. There is, sadly, one glaring problem. The scene changes operate in a farcical fashion, with actors dropping character and joining the stage manager in a bouncy, clownish transition that sullies the tone. It feels like a misguided attempt to stamp originality into a disability drama, which would have been more unique and memorable without the clownish inclusion. The performances alone are worth seeing, but it is sad that unnecessary trivialities have weakened an otherwise enthralling piece.

Underbelly, 5 - 29 Aug, 4.10pm (5.10pm), £6.50 - £10.50, fpp 254. [np]
tw rating 3/5

Sunset Song

Assembley & Aberdeen Performing Arts

This adaptation of Gibbon's classic novel is an epic by Fringe standards, coming in at over two hours long and sweeping through years of suicide, infanticide, war and violence, all before lunch. The production looks a bit lost in the vast Music Hall and lines are frequently drowned out by a combination of acoustics and actors' feet hammering on the undeadened stage floor. The early 20th century setting seems incongruous with the projection screen and slick wooden flooring,

but this becomes less distracting as the story develops and the cast come into their own. Excellent physicality and tons of energy combine to bring the community of Kirnaddie to life and keep things interesting throughout the lengthy running time.

Assembly @ George Street, 5 - 30 Aug, 11.40am (1.50pm), £16.00 - £20.00, fpp 292. [jm]
tw rating 3/5

The Lassies O

Component Parts

Women ignored in the official biography of Burns are charmingly brought to life in this humorous and moving production. The play takes us through Robbie's life in the form of five monologues. Through the eyes of his relative we see him as a superstitious little boy, his mother-in-law reveals him as a lustful poet and, most movingly, his compassionate neighbour depicts him as a vulnerable man on his deathbed. Delivered in Scots, some of the nuances of the script may be lost to those with an untrained ear, but with the live music and song interspersed throughout, it creates a play so authentic you feel as if you have travelled back in time. A brilliant piece by five wonderful lassies.

Henderson's Vegetarian Restaurant and Arts Venue, dates and times vary, £8.00 - £10.00, fpp 265. [ko]
tw rating 4/5

Mysterious Skin

Em-Lou Productions and Neil Sheppeck

Adapted from the novel of the same name by Scott Heim, this is an interesting play delivered by strong performers. It recounts two parallel stories about two characters, Neil and Brian, then connects them together at the end, as it becomes apparent that previously they have shared an experience which has significantly affected them. Although the structure of the play is basically good, the script is uninspired, the dialogue quite often sounds clichéd, and certain scenes were also too long. Despite this, there are some funny moments, but above all, the denouement is shocking and totally unexpected; this is complemented by faultless acting from an undoubtedly talented cast.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, 4 - 30 Aug, 1.00pm (2.15pm), £6.00 - £10.00, fpp 274. [cc]
tw rating 3/5

Photo 51

Theatre With Teeth

An innovative reinterpretation of how biography is portrayed. Combining elements of Brechtian and physical theatre, the five person cast immerse the audience in the world of Rosalind Franklin, unappreciated discoverer of the double helix, reliving her life and the acquaintances she met along the way. A visual delight, the play looks at complex and potentially dull topics and makes them accessible to all. Using a selection of props as metaphors for unfolding events and an inventive soundtrack, the cast cleverly converts one woman's curiosity and intense adherence to her work into a spectacle of light, sound and movement. Not just for fans of science, this is recommended to all who are looking for something different at the festival.

Zoo Roxy, 6 - 28 Aug (not 16, 23), 5.15pm (6.15pm), £5.00 - £8.00, fpp 279. [aq]
tw rating 3/5

Three Of Hearts

Five One Productions

'Three Of Hearts' is an exquisitely poetic play centred on three interconnected people and their individual heartache. It was a pleasure to watch this spellbinding and powerful performance; particularly striking was the portrayal of the mother character mourning the loss of her son, but all three actors supported and complemented each other, demonstrating an ability to perform well as a group, as well as independently with ease. The fantastic script by Sarah Goddard flowed effortlessly and eloquently, showing a real talent for poetry and storytelling. The plot was well thought out with a poignant message about love and acceptance, and there was no repetition, so each new monologue felt fresh and unique. Frankly this piece deserves a lot more credit and praise than this short review is able to provide.

C Central, 5 - 30 Aug, 1.15pm (2.15pm), £6.50 - £9.50, fpp 296. [sj]
tw rating 5/5

Pip Utton Is Charles Dickens

Pip Utton

Few actors seem as fresh and unscripted as Pip Utton, who has a talent for sounding

like he's chatting to a mate: you could almost think he's out of character, were it not for the Dickensian beard. Charles Dickens is the focus of this show, in which he candidly recounts his own death and the previous few months. Utton uses some of the famous readings from Dickens' tours of Britain, and focuses on the author as social reformer, highlighting the social conscience underlying much of his work, and it makes for an absorbing 70 minutes. Utton is an expert at creating an intimate connection with his audience, and as he closes, one gets the sense of being in the hands of a master at work.

New Town Theatre, 5 - 29 Aug (not 17), 6.45pm (7.55pm), £8.00 - £10.00, fpp 279. [rtw]
tw rating 4/5

An Evening With Elsie Parsons

White Crow Theatre Company

This play's subject matter sounds promisingly theatrical: poltergeists, the paranormal and psychic possession. Sadly, it's a promise this staid melodrama failed to live up to. 'An Evening With Elsie Parsons', which detailed the clairvoyant experiences of a couple of "spirit mediums", was an overly long, plodding piece of theatre with a dated feel. Although the two actors, in particular Lorraine Chase, tried their hardest to inject excitement into the tedious script, and did conjure some uncanny moments, the play never gained momentum. So when the denouement was reached, my attention had wandered. By the end, I still wasn't entirely sure who Elsie Parsons was or is, but I certainly had no inclination to spend another evening with her. The Dome on George Street, 7 - 28 Aug, 8.00pm (9.20pm), £8.00 - £10.00, fpp 249. [ac]
tw rating 2/5

Jack The Knife

Jack Klaff

This one man show, performed by an actor of towering presence and ability, takes risks that few comedians dare. A veteran of stage, screen and lecture theatre, Jack Klaff demonstrates old school charisma; his natural delivery, coupled with a slippery and meta-theatrical script, creates the exhilarating impression that he's just making it all up. The story, told through fragmented and associative anecdotes, is about choice - how choice is scientifically, spiritually, and creatively at the heart of everything we do, whether in conversation, performance, or politics. If you're interested in the arts, neuroscience, conjuring, democracy, history - scratch that - if you have any interests at all, this show will stimulate both your mind and your funnybone. Highly recommended.

Assembly @ George Street, Aug, 12.45pm (1.55pm), £7.50 - £9.50, fpp 262. [tm]
tw rating 5/5

Virtuous Burglar

SPL

I was not looking forward to this performance as Dario Fo tends to get both preachy and obvious and since the Fringe programme says that the burglar turns out to be the virtuous one, I was sure I was in for an hour of being taken to task for my bourgeois shit. Thankfully, none of the characters exhibit anything remotely resembling virtue as this fast-paced loopy comedy is a tightly wound knot of mistaken identities that would put Shakespeare to shame. The burglar's wife calling him 'at work' thereby sets off a chain of events that spins delightfully out of control. Masterfully played with perfect timing by an ensemble cast of seven, farce doesn't get much better than this.

Assembly @ George Street, 05 - 30 Aug (not 16, 23), 2.15pm (3.15pm), £5.00 - £12.00, fpp 302. [sl]
tw rating 4/5</