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COMEDY

Tiernan Douieb: Littlest Things

Brett Vincent for getcomedy.com

Tiernan Douieb is one of the chirpiest men you will ever meet; the antithesis of the likes of Dylan Moran, his upbeat nature and desire to be nice are overwhelming. The show explores the little things others do that can make your day, unsung heroes and, randomly, the versatility of waffles. He skilfully moves from topic to topic like a pro, and his simple observational humour is refreshing. But his show was not just a conveyor-belt of gags; Douieb's anecdotes on women and friends were unexpectedly thoughtful and moving, and, sharing his woes with the audience, he felt less like a comedian and more like a good mate. Funny, vulnerable though a touch sanctimonious, Douieb is a different, friendly sort of comedian.

Just The Tonic at the Caves, 5 - 29 Aug (not 16), 9.20pm (10.20pm), £8.00 - £10.00, fpp 131. [ka]
tw rating 3/5

It's Funtime Funtime Organisation

There's no denying this is a strange proposition. A pub quiz / game show hybrid, compered by a man channelling Dave Spikey from 'Phoenix Nights'? A final round in which the winning team, dressed as robots, pile boxes in a pyramid? And yet, despite its quirkiness, or perhaps because of it, it works. It includes some conventional rounds, as well as odd physical challenges, like holding a pint-glass full of pennies aloft, or dressing a teammate as cupid using only twisting balloons. There are prizes on offer, but in this instance it really is the taking part that counts. Round up a posse of your mates and head along; you will have a blast. It's silly. It's bonkers. It's funtime.

The Bongo Club, 10, 17, 24 Aug, 7.30pm (9.15pm), £6.00 - £7.00, fpp 73. [aj]
tw rating 4/5

Yianni Agisilaou in 'The Universe: A User's Guide'

Yianni Agisilaou/PBH's Free Fringe

This very funny examination of what the Universe is takes us right from the Big Bang to the modern-day experiments in the Large Hadron Collider, and does so in hilarious fashion. Yianni shares with us his fascination with the cosmos, and manages to help us, not only to understand it, but to take delight in it too. His routine on how fast humans travel whilst sitting still, based on the speed of the Earth's rotation, was a particular highlight; the only problem was the fact that Yianni was constantly checking his laptop to remember what came next. Despite this, Yianni's show is interesting, funny and favourably comparable to the recent TV Series 'Wonders of the Solar System'.

Cabaret Voltaire, 7 - 28 Aug (not 16), 7.15pm (8.15pm), free, fpp 140. [dc]
tw rating 4/5

Bec Hill Didn't Want To Play Your Stupid Game Anyway

Roly Poly Grandma Productions

Filled with the energy and enthusiasm of a child, Bec Hill and her side-splittingly funny



SNAP OF THE DAY: It's all about the 'uke' this Fringe, cabaret favourites Sarah Louise Young and Tricity Vogue. Photo: Kate Edwards

stand-up routine are a joy to behold. Our immensely entertaining host takes us on a wild ride as she tries hard to define what an adult is, whilst detailing why adulthood confuses her; it makes for a show that's bursting with jokes, and never a dull moment. Aided by hilarious flow-charts and clever hand-drawn animations, Bec Hill shows that she is multi-talented and capable of producing truly brilliant comedy with the aid of each one of her skills. I highly recommend this show to everyone; you'll fall in love with Bec's excitable attitude and her witty optimism. Definitely a name to remember with a smile.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, 4 - 30 Aug (not 17), 4.00pm (5.00pm), £5.00 - £9.00, fpp 33. [dc]
tw rating 5/5

Frisco Fred's Comedy Hour

Fred Anderson And Comedy On The Square

Rarely can you accuse an act at the fringe of not trying, but you can claim that some try too hard; the grand introductions at the beginning of the show inevitably meant that the acts themselves would prove underwhelming. Whilst there were some

genuinely funny jokes and some truly amazing tricks, the showmanship was overdone, while other jokes just weren't funny. The magician also made the mistake of telling us that they were performing in another show in the Fringe, and the other is "what we're really here for". The lack of rehearsal and commitment was abundantly clear, and, whilst local ukulele band Pocketfox were an interesting addition, they could not save the show.

Laughing Horse @ The Counting House, 5 - 29 Aug (not 17), 9pm (10.00pm), free, fpp 65. [ajb]
tw rating 2/5

Jarred Christmas Stands Up

Gilded Balloon

Jarred Christmas prances and bellows so vivaciously under the hot lights of the billiard room that I worried he would boil over or explode. It was only a preview in fact, but his voice was already croaking from the strain of attacking his audience with jokes, flung into the front rows in a flurry of excess saliva and sideburn, while also incorporating interludes of maniacal dance and song into his routine. He's a vociferous proponent

of all things unselfconscious while vilifying the snobbish, humourless and 'wank', but Christmas's anecdotes do not always match their enthusiasm with originality of material or skill in delivery, while his brash laddishness sometimes clashes with his camp theatrics. In all, however, a very solid, very sweaty show.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, 4 - 30 Aug (not 12, 13, 14), 8.00pm (9.00pm), £8.50 - £10.50, fpp 75. [kb]
tw rating 3/5

Pension Plan Leisa Rea

"Make something good out of something bad" was Leisa Rea's parting message to us, and she certainly practises what she preaches, as she has created a fun stand-up show out of her own life's mishaps. Leisa decides to give failure a voice, and turns her life story into a party, coming up with some witty jokes and stories that are a reminder that truth is often stranger (and funnier) than fiction. However, given the depressing subject matter, it is possible that some people may not find much to laugh at here, despite Leisa's encouragements; nevertheless, I

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COMEDY CENTRAL

cont>> found her surprisingly optimistic show to be quite cheering, and she deserves credit for the happiness that she inspires in her audience.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, 4 – 29 Aug (not 17), 2.00pm (2.55pm), £5.00 - £9.50, fpp 108. [dc]

tw rating 3/5

The Lunchtime Club

Best Medicine Management
‘The Lunchtime Club’ features three very funny young men alongside two exceptionally hairy, dark-spirited comics who bear an uncanny resemblance to Wolverine. This is a Very Good Thing. There’s no sense here of young comedians trying to develop their acts or hone their skills: these guys know how to tell jokes. I’ve seen so much lacklustre stand-up comedy at the Fringe over the last few days that I was struck by the novelty of not one, but five comedians whose gags were actually funny. Special mention goes to Joel Dommett, whose demented smile and lolloping gait simply enhance a manically funny act - he’s a disarmingly funny presence – but the quality is maintained throughout. The Lunchtime Club is fast, innovative, polished, and, at five pounds, an absolute snip.

Downstairs at the Tron, 5 – 29 Aug (not 16, 23), 12.30pm (2.00pm), £5.00, fpp 90. [kc]

tw rating: 4/5

Maff Brown – Looking After Lesal

Phil McIntyre Entertainments By Arrangement With Michele Milburn At International Artistes

Small audiences are inevitable at the fringe, but not necessarily a bad thing. The added intimacy at Maff Brown’s show, which is at once craftily comic and curiously heartfelt, was inescapable: the audience of seven were entirely locked in; we laughed together and reflected as one. The basis of the material was his life in 2009: his mother’s death and the subsequent plight of his dad [Lesal]. Brown worked the small room well, and included everyone, but should have had more faith in himself, and paused for more laughs. Some of his tactics were questionably high-school, but did help to keep up the mood. A great display of love and optimism.

Pleasance Courtyard, 4 – 30 Aug (not 16), 9.30pm (10.30pm), £5.00 - £12.00, fpp 91. [ajb]

tw rating 3/5

Patrick Monahan – I Walked I Danced, Iran

Phil McIntyre Entertainment By Arrangement With Vivienne Smith Management

Patrick Monahan’s quirky mix of nationalities, as he notes, should make him an incredibly hard man, but instead has given him a conglomeration of cultures which act as fodder for his stand up routine. His passion to get to know the audience, which took up a considerable proportion of the show, meant participation was virtually compulsory and his quick reactions worked to great comedic effect. Supplementing this interaction with some engaging observational comedy led to moments of belly-laughing delight, but it seems slightly more difficult to give credit when much of the source of the comedy came unintentionally from the spectators. Recommended to those that enjoy participation, but slightly lacking in substantial material.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, 4 – 29 Aug (not 9, 16, 23), 9.00pm (10.00pm), £5.00 - £12.20, fpp107. [aq]

tw rating 3/5

Phil Kay: In Tweed

Gilded Balloon
The musings of an eccentric, mad and somewhat offensive Scotsman. Screaming through stories and personal anecdotes, Kay delivers fast paced comedy of a ramshackle character; constantly deviating from his tales onto even funnier tangents, Kay isn’t afraid to show off his abundance of material. Displaying enough energy to fuel the whole festival, he really comes alive for the audience, bounding about the stage and using any of the available props around him to his advantage. Featuring reminiscences of numerous run-ins with the law where his cheeky wit almost pushes his luck, this isn’t well structured comedic writing, but an oral account of the everyday life of a genuinely funny man.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, 5 – 26 Aug (not 17), 7.00pm (7.50pm), £5.00 - £10.00, fpp109. [aq]

tw rating 4/5

A Surprisingly Tasteful Show about Nudity

Alexis Dubus
Had Alexis Dubus rocked up during my student years and proceeded to give us all a lecture on the history of nudity from ancient times to the present day, I am sure

there would have been more than a few satisfied lady students in the auditorium. He has a charming charisma which makes for a learned but enjoyable experience, and although there are one too many penis gags for my liking, overall Dubus has a personable approach with tales of Adelaide’s first naked bike ride and his own forays into the world of nudism. Dubus has, ahem, a lot of front, which might be at odds with the Tron’s pint-wielding punters’ expectations for a show about nudity.

Downstairs at the Tron, 6- 30 Aug (not 18), 5.00pm (6.00pm), £5.00, fpp 127 [rj]

tw rating 3/5

DANCE AND PHYSICAL THEATRE

Falling From Trees Neon Productions
Adrienne Hart has choreographed an impressive short piece, bursting with bold lines and levels, that easily fills the Zoo’s largest performance space. Her choreography revolves around a confident and accessible vocabulary, which helps to deliver a clear narrative, and the performers engage in some terrific extensions and suspensions. Peter Broderick’s score is excellent, and leads the piece through a satisfyingly complete range of moods and styles, before finishing in an affecting and understated fashion. However, Alice Powell’s video projection is distracting, and smudges the potentially effective lighting design. The story is so strongly told through the performers’ bodies that one wonders about the necessity for mixed-media in Hart’s work – nevertheless, she is a choreographer to watch.

Zoo Roxy, 6 – 14 Aug, 2.30pm (3.00pm), £8.00 - £10.00, fpp 147. [tm]

tw rating 4/5

As Far As The Beach

Z Theatre Company
This new student piece dramatises the struggle of a family coping with their son’s illness. Sadly, it is fundamentally unbelievable. The script is poorly crafted; all speak with the same contrived style of speech; we barely meet characters before their lives start spiralling downwards, creating an immediate sense of narrative nausea. Performances are so painstakingly melodramatic I initially assumed it was satirising soap dramas, while orgotten cues are clearly whispered on-stage. The use of music is clichéd and imposes emotions upon you, and the interpretive dances feel incongruous and deeply patronising, as if the audience are incapable of comprehending cancer without a visual nudge. I concede that some were moved to tears, but they were all wearing Z Company hoodies.

theSpace @ Venue45, 9 – 19 Aug (not 15), 1.10pm (2.00pm), £3.50, fpp 142. [np]

tw rating 1/5

Brazil! Brazil! Underbelly Productions/World Stage Productions/Developing World Health

Warning: this show is going to make you want to pack your bags and move to Brazil. In a riotous explosion of talent, a stunning troupe of singers, musicians, football pros and Capoeira artists celebrate the things that make their country special. Some of the stunts took my breath away and the whole atmosphere was exhilarating. The music will soon have you swaying, stamping and clapping your hands; my only regret is that I had to stay in my seat, rather than get up and dance. A few lucky people did join the performers onstage, so get there early for a seat right at the front of this unforgettable show.

Udderbelly’s Pasture, 4 - 30 Aug (not 16), 6.55pm (7.55pm), £8.00 - £15.00, fpp 144 [crc]

tw rating 5/5

MUSICALS AND OPERA

Slice of Saturday Night
Canvas Theatre University of Gloucestershire
As the opening song acknowledges, Club A-Go-Go could be any club in 1964 filled with any group of teenagers. You’ll find all the teen stereotypes here, but the clichés are exploited well and this is not just a twee nostalgia piece, but rather a more knowing look at the anxieties we all face as we move towards adulthood and get to grips (or don’t) with the opposite sex. The Heather Brothers’ ingratiating, authentic-sounding score is not universally well sung, but there are some strong voices and confident performances, and the cast can certainly dance. While it’s

a pity that we don’t get time to know the characters better, it’s good to see a strong ensemble cast in action.

theSpace @ Venue 45, 6 – 14 Aug (not 8), 6.10pm (7.00pm), £5.00 - £6.00, fpp 218. [jm]

tw rating 3/5

Spontaneous Broadway
Geoff Paine, Julia Zemiro, Russell Fletcher, Ross Daniels, Genevieve Morris

Improvised humour always seems to get louder laughs, perhaps because it feels like a joke shared between audience and performer, rather than one simply transmitted from one to the other. On this basis, ‘Spontaneous Broadway’ makes for an unbeatable evening’s entertainment. In the relaxed, informal Spiegeltent, this tight group of actors will take song titles invented by the audience and weave an entire musical from them. After seeing previews of all the musicals, you get to choose which one you want performed in full. It’s a hilarious and impressive feat, recommended for any fan of musicals or improvisation, and what makes this show special is the friendly charm of the actors and the scorching skills of the improvising pianist.

The Famous Spiegeltent, 10 – 29 Aug (not 16, 23), 5.00pm (6.10pm), £12.00 - £10.00, fpp 218. [mg]

tw rating 4/5

Fresher. The Musical
Paulden Productions and the Blue

The musical guilty pleasure of this year’s fringe has arrived with ‘Fresher. The Musical’, a fun but blindingly simple tale of a group of flatmates stumbling through their drunken first days of university. The spiritual heir to last year’s ‘Facebook: The Musical’ (but quite a bit better than that), ‘Fresher’ has its tongue firmly in cheek throughout, and is entertainingly full of unadulterated clichés and over-the-top singing, even if it’s a pity that only a few of the actors pull it off absolutely convincingly. Perhaps I liked it because, as a student who’s just finished their first year of university, there were parts (and only parts!) of my experience that somehow rang true in the characters on stage. The show is mostly nonsense, but fresher than the average nonsense.

Zoo Roxy, 6 - 30 Aug (not 16), 5.35pm (6.45pm), £7.50 - £9.50, fpp 211. [ef]

tw rating 2/5

THEATRE

Bound

Bear Trap Theatre Company
Bound is one of those plays that occasionally come to the fringe, which whack you round the face and force you to consider its place, not just here, but in contemporary British theatre as a whole. It is a play that reflects, and is for, our time. Threatened by bankruptcy as their parent company goes into administration, a mismatched group of sailors go out to sea in the hope of finding fish that will keep their business and hopes for the future afloat. The script by East-15 graduate Jesse Briton (who also stars) is near-perfect, tight and poetic in turns, with characters you don’t just care about, but also recognise. Electrifying from start to finish, this is powerful, unmissable drama.
Zoo Southside, 6 - 30 Aug, 3.45pm (4.45pm), £6.50 - £7.50, fpp 233. [ef]

tw rating 5/5

The Big Smoke

Theatre Ad Infitum
When I saw the names Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton cited as the inspiration for this show, I knew I was in for a dose of hardcore, angsty feminism. Sure enough, this was a piece that addressed the recurring feminist themes of creativity, the struggle for self-realisation, and madness, but with a memorable and fresh reworking. The solo performer stood on a bare stage, and gave an unsettling, sung account of mental breakdown, using her body and her powerful voice to wring emotion from every word and every note. Incredibly intense, dark, disturbing, but also beautiful, this was a remarkable piece of theatre that, unlike its tormented heroine, achieved its full creative potential.
Pleasance Dome, 4 – 30 Aug (not 17, 24), 2.20pm (3.20pm), £7.50 - £10.00, fpp 143. [ac]

tw rating 4/5

Reality Vaccine
Ian Souch/Laughing Horse Free Festival
Ian Souch clearly has a facility for carrying out interesting tricks. Over the course of the show he performs feats so impressive

they make him appear psychic, ranging from simple things like guessing cards to more complex tasks like predicting the number an audience volunteer will look up in a telephone directory. He makes good use of music to enhance the atmosphere, but it’s a pity that his delivery is not more confident, as there is plenty here to be confident about. A little more chutzpah and a bit more direction to the show, as well as a clearer definition and explanation of mentalism at the outset, would transform this show from simply interesting to truly entertaining.

Laughing Horse@The Newsroom, 5 – 23 Aug (not 16), 6.15pm (7.15pm), fpp 282. [jm]

tw rating 3/5

Speechless Shared Experience/Sherman Cymru
“Speechless” dramatises the astonishing true story of twin elective mutes June and Jennifer Gibbons, as racial abuse forces them to shut out the world and form a disturbing bond with only each other. The acting is strong, and leads Natasha Gordon and Demi Oyediran are impressive. Voiceover excerpts from the real twins’ diaries are a chillingly authentic inclusion, and the patriotic Englishness surrounding and influencing the twins emphasises their traumatic alienation and struggle for vocal identity amongst a white community. However, the play isn’t challenging enough; events aren’t really probed or presented in a particularly enlightening or perception-changing way, and the introduction of Kennedy comes too late and is under-developed. The concept is fascinating, but the production isn’t flawless.
Traverse Theatre, Aug 5 – 29 (not 9, 23), times vary, £6.00 - £17.00, fpp 290. [gjs]

tw rating 3/5

Uber Hate Gang

Horizon Arts
You feel like you’ve just walked into a hip club in Hamburg; with the smoke machine, blaring rock music, neon lights and brick. Cool, but things are about to become uncomfortable - very uncomfortable - as the ‘Uber Hate Gang’ is a terrorist organisation that has planted a bomb in this very theatre and you, and they, have 60 minutes to live: “They still think it’s a play” laughs one of them. I found myself smiling nervously, like when my trans-Atlantic flight hit really bad turbulence. Into the middle of all this male (and female) bravado, drops one comical Ted Edwards who becomes the soul of the play. This explosive, in-your-face meta-theatre, in the end, has a very big heart.
Underbelly, Cowgate, 05 - 29 Aug (not 16), 12.00pm (1.10pm), £6.00 - £10.00, fpp 300. [sl]

tw rating 5/5

The Four Women Of The Apocalypse - Free

Roisin Rae/PBH’s Free Fringe
The four women of the title are the sole survivors (maybe) of an unspecified global catastrophe. The only prop on stage, a two-way army radio, provides a clever conceit for the audience to listen in as each survivor takes a turn at sending out messages into the void, in hopes of finding other survivors. Keely, the hot one, talks to her hair straightener; Anne, the spiritual one, is raising two darling cockroaches; Beth is miffed at Vanessa, who had the bad manners to turn up alive after they had held a very moving funeral for her. Rae moves fluidly between her four characters in this witty and intelligent comedy that bristles with delightfully British humour.

Kiwi Bar @ Walkabout, 07 - 28 Aug (not 11, 18, 25), 5.00pm (5.50pm), free, fpp 254. [sl]

tw rating 4/5

Burst paper tiger
A play about upheaval in two eras: 1920s Britain, the jazz age, and 1950s Sudan, the birth of independence. Both promised freedom and empowerment for all, but the reality was not so wonderful. ‘Burst’ identified so many issues (feminism, patriotism, ruralism), but unfortunately failed to explore any. Understanding the story depended on great leaps of imagination and an impeccable memory as gaps were left unfilled and connections unmade. The beautiful music, set and staging made an empty play at least nice to watch, but there was a great preoccupation with unexplained Sudanese cultural rituals which were beyond the understanding of an Edinburgh audience. I felt this interesting world was being shut off rather than opened up to me.

The Zoo, 6 – 21 Aug, 8.15pm (9.15pm), £6.00 - £8.00, fpp 235. [mg]

tw rating 2/5

Dead Poets

Dead Poets/PBH’s Free Fringe
A fascinating combination of words, rhythm and rhymes; within seconds the audience is hooked until the end. A poet, Mark Grist, and a rapper, MC Mixy, together create a sparkling autobiographic monologue. Different poetics, different voices: “I rhyme carefully” says the first one, “My words bit hard,” says the second, but it’s precisely in their diversity that these young artists find their own strength and originality. When they share their inner questions and personal reflections with the audience, finally, for once, the autobiography of two artists is not self-celebratory but frank, sincere and above all self-deprecating. Entertaining and clever, plus it’s free.

The Banshee Labyrinth, 7 - 28 Aug, 12.30 am (1.30 pm), free, fpp 242. [ga]

tw rating 4/5

Fen

Exposure Theatre Company
Given that the plot of ‘Fen’ revolves around issues that would normally take an experienced actor to understand, the all-female cast of pre-University students does exceptionally well. Following the emotional problems of a mother living in a tight-knit rural community, ‘Fen’ is excellently performed, and provides a compelling and moving hour of theatre. The group uses a well-chosen soundtrack to direct the audience’s response, and their a cappella songs are delivered beautifully. This small cast performs with a maturity and sensitivity that belies their years, and whilst the scene changes aren’t particularly smooth (perhaps a result of the documentary style of the piece), ‘Fen’ proves a thought-provoking and poignant piece that is well worth watching.

Diverse Attractions, 9 – 14 Aug, 11.30am (12.30pm), £6.00 – £9.00, fpp 250. [lw]

tw rating 4/5

I’m In Love With A Vending Machine

East Cowes Acting Troupe
This curiosity piece sees Italian Commedia dell’arte updated to a mad modern-day world, complete with clever tricksters, bumbling buffoons and rhyming couplets. The teenage cast seem to be enjoying themselves and there are some fairly amusing moments, but both the script and the acting are often awkward, plus, the plot needs a few more twists and turns to stand a chance of grabbing our attention. Still, I did leave with a smile on my face, because there are some nice touches here. We get a well-judged piece of audience participation, a feisty Columbian and a few songs (the title tune was a particular favourite). Sadly, even though it’s a cute, likeable show, it’s not a great one.

Augustine’s, 9 - 14 Aug, 11.50am (12.40pm), £4.00 - £6.00, fpp 260. [crc]

tw rating 2/5

I’m No Hero
Ava Hunt in association with Tangere Arts
Irena Sandler smuggled babies out of the Warsaw ghetto, Rachel Corrie stood up for persecuted Arabs in Gaza; two real women linked, in ‘I’m No Hero’, by their courage and compassion in defending the stricken for no demonstrable reason or reward. Ava Hunt’s big double performance is the highlight here, and makes up what it lacks in subtlety with conviction and stomach. The rest of the production is dicey and confused. The show falls down largely because the simple comparison of two brave women sits uncomfortably beside the complex comparison of the Holocaust with the second Intifada. There are galling moments of inform-the-audience condescension and, though both women deserve genuine tribute, they are done little serious justice here.

Diverse Attractions, 10 – 21 Aug, times vary, £8.50 - £10.00, fpp 260. [kb]

tw review 2/5

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