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COMEDY

Des Bishop - My Dad Was Nearly James Bond

Lisa Richards Ltd. And EdCom

Comedy meets the tragic circumstances of life in Des Bishop's routine, which pays tribute to his father - a nearly James Bond of yesteryear. Now suffering from lung cancer, Bishop's dad is the inspiration for an unusual, deeply moving and very funny exploration of the complex relationship between fathers and sons. Initially I was taken aback by Bishop's slightly aggressive delivery, but soon this masculine veneer slips as he reminisces about his childhood to a backdrop of fascinating photographs that earmark the highs and lows of their relationship. It's rare that I leave comedy with tears in my eyes inspired by a deeper emotion than amusement. Indeed the depth of Bishop's story ensured a deserved standing ovation.

Assembly @ George Street, 5-29 Aug (not 16, 23)
8.05pm (9.05pm), £11.00 - £14.00, fpp 55. [rj]

tw rating 5/5

Andrew Collins - Secret Dancing

Andrew Collins

A wry smile is sometimes just as desirable as a full on belly laugh, especially when it's inspired in a good way. The likeable Andrew Collins presents a witty, pun-filled and intelligent show that demonstrates the strength of this consciously quiet observer of life on the commuter conveyor belt. If you want something zany, however, this might be a little bit too Surrey-based-Guardian-reader for you, plus, although Collins certainly has the power to produce the sardonic, his show seems just too insulated and flabby to keep me talking about it into next week. This is a good example of a solid and dependable Free Fringe show, however, so go see this if you want a chilled giggle over a lunch-time pint. Bannermans, 7-21 Aug, 12.30pm, free, fpp 27. [mb]

tw rating 3/5

Celia Paquola - Flying Solos

Gilded Balloon/Adams Management

The Pointer Sisters' 1982 hit 'I'm So Excited' features a difficult 22-second piano solo that non-pianist Paquola promises to play before the hour is out. So begins a delightful, confessional tale spun by a boundlessly entertaining comedian who digs into her past and sheds light, for our pleasure, on her best 'solos': her most woeful/joyful moments of unaccompanied exposure. Paquola is potentially vulnerable on-stage because she takes the courageous risk of throwing some genuine heart and soul into her set; among so many detached, 'ironic' comedians this fact alone is enormously refreshing and, coupled with her grinning vigour (and video-cameos from her inspiring mother Pam), the risk pays off. Raucous, noisy and strangely moving, this is fine modern comedy

Gilded Balloon Teviot, 4-30 Aug (not 17), 6.00pm (7.00pm), £8.50 - £10.50, fpp 41. [kb]

tw review 4/5



SNAP OF THE DAY: James Sherwood will auction off his trusty piano at the end of the Fringe. Keep your eye on ThreeWeeks.co.uk for details of how to bid. Photo: James Robertson

Sound And Fury's 'Testaclese And Ye Sack Of Rome'

Sound & Fury/Laughing Horse Free Festival

'Fakespeare's' lost masterpiece of infidelity, matricide and fake boobs is once more brought to life by these three exuberant actors. This is essentially a comprehensive compendium of classically-inspired innuendos, a platter of crudities artfully arranged to form a play: think Kenneth Williams, but more American, and less dead. Sound and Fury are no strangers to the Fringe: this show has been performed here before, though it has been updated to include some material about Lindsay Lohan's Sapphic leanings. As they encouraged everyone to boo and cheer in a Panto-like fashion, the trio proved themselves experts at handling the crowd ('Ooh, matron'), many of whom had come before (nudge). 'Testacles' illustrates the old adage, 'When in Rome, do ass - the Romans do'.

Laughing Horse @ Espionage, 5-29 Aug (not 20, 21, 22, 23), 9.30pm (10.30pm), Free, fpp 125. [gg]

tw rating 4/5

The (Almost) Carbon Neutral Comedy Club by Day

Rob Coleman/Laughing Horse Free Festival

So many comedians manage to waste the first ten minutes of their set making some sort of play on the level of applause the audience provides. This was no different.

Watching most of this rag-tag collection of comedians I felt like I was in a Blue Peter audience, or something, competing to win on the clap-o-meter, and it became tiring. Some of these guys had some genuinely interesting and witty things to throw at us, and were definitely a perhaps-see, while others were simply underwhelming and as decidedly damp as it was outside (less talk of vagina and pregnancy please, we all know it's awkward and a cheap thrill). This show was saved by the fact that it was free.

Laughing Horse @ The Counting House, 5-29 Aug, 3.10pm (4.00pm), free, fpp 24.

Laughing Horse @ Meadow Bar, 5-29 Aug, 9.00pm (10.00pm), free, fpp 24.

tw rating 2/5

[mb]

MacAulay And Co.

BBC Radio Scotland

This live recording of the 'MacAulay And Co.' radio show features spots from many of the big acts of the Fringe punctuated with audience banter and interviews with comedians. The affable Fred MacAulay and offside Susan Calman do a fine job of working the crowd, and their guests aren't half bad either. Some highlights from Monday's show included a set from Sydney outfit the Axis of Awesome and interviews with self-professed 'prodigy' Bo Burnham, English comic Sarah

Millican and 'Cheers' star George Wendt. It's a festival breakfast buffet; a great way to decide what to see, with the additional excitement of being part of a live broadcast of the national station, where your laughter becomes a (small) part of BBC history.

Venue 150 @ EICC, 9-20 Aug (not 14, 15), 10.00am (11.30am), free, fpp 91. [ve]

tw rating 4/5

The Edinburgh Revue Presents...

PBH's Free Fringe

It is impossible to know exactly what to expect from The Edinburgh Revue, as different acts perform each day and half the week sees stand-up while the other half hosts sketches. However, if the fresh-faced line-up at the show I saw is anything to go by, then the least you can expect is a showcase of young comics, all with considerable potential. Many of the acts were admirably unique and clearly trying to carve out their own distinct style, although very few sustained this aim throughout the entirety of their short sets. The show undoubtedly peaked half way through with the inspired Nazi Synthesiser, and the raw talent of the performers was clear to see; this bodes well for future line-ups.

Cabaret Voltaire, 7-28 Aug, 2.15pm (3.15pm), free, fpp 57. [lj]

tw rating 3/5

C (+1) 4-30 Aug (not 16) at 12:15pm

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The Leftovers

Leftovers

If you can envisage feeling amused, bemused and, well, slightly afraid all at the same time, you have gone some way to experiencing the sheer absurdity of an hour spent with The Leftovers. Razor-sharp wordplay (and consistently dreadful punning) is combined with polished performances from this talented trio, and the show is held together as a whole with cleverly linked gags and constant meta-theatrical reminders that Si, Jez and Neil are trying (and, they insist, failing) to write a sketch show. Original, raucous, and altogether mystifying, The Leftovers are on to a winning formula: if you get it, you'll love it. If you don't get it, get out.

Just the Tonic at The Caves, 7 - 15, 17 - 29 Aug, 3.20pm, £5.00 - £7.50, fpp 88. [lw]

tw rating 5/5

Jay Sodagar Opinions Are Free

Jay Sodagar/ Laughing Horse Free Festival

The crowd was a comedian's worst nightmare: in the bowels of Espionage, Jay Sodagar had the unenviable task of performing in front of three reviewers, a stony-faced couple from South Africa and two French guys who admitted they barely understood English. However, the personable stand-up faced this challenge with good humour, and made a sterling attempt to keep us entertained with his passionate tirades against racists and the arms trade, and more personal material that confronted the tragedies of his own life with honesty, wit, and not an ounce of self-pity. Although not quite able to dispel the sluggish atmosphere tonight, Sodagar is an engaging performer who really does deserve a bigger audience.

Laughing Horse@Espionage, 6 - 18 Aug, 8.30pm (9.30pm), free, fpp 76. [ac]

tw rating 3/5

Kitty Go Miaow Miaow Presents...Katrina Thompson

Katrina Thompson

This is a stand-up comedy routine delivered in the form of a faux talent show, pitting Carla Bruni against Lady Gaga, amongst others. The impressions are intentionally half-arsed, which only adds to the comedy, as did the clearly rigged finale. Highlights include Rose West's ventriloquism and a bitter song from a relationship counsellor questioning her ex-husband's sexuality. Unfortunately, for every joke that landed there was another which prompted only a chuckle, and another which missed the mark altogether. This gave the routine a stilted, inconsistent rhythm, which is unfortunate as when she's on form Thompson is very funny indeed. With a more consistent routine, and fewer jokes that require intimate knowledge of London boroughs, she would definitely be one to watch.

Laughing Horse @ The Hive, 06 - 29 Aug (not 16, 23), 5.15pm (6.15pm), free, fpp 85. [al]

tw rating 3/5

The Roaring Boys Will Set You Free

Roaring Boys

Danny and Jonny, The Roaring Boys, present their absolutely hilarious protest against 'The One Show' with witty asides, stellar one-liners and a sharp script (which is often apparently ignored by the performers in favour of ad-libbing). Not only were the audience in stitches half the time, they were also in the show to some extent, as The Roaring Boys have a unique way of including their audience; I won't ruin it by revealing it here. Danny and Jonny spend most of their time at one another's throats, and create comical feuds that bring Laurel and Hardy to mind. This was a superb show with only one problem: it will leave your sides badly damaged from all the laughing you will do.

Underbelly, Cowgate, 5 - 29 Aug (not 17 or 24), 5.40pm, £6.00 - £10.50, fpp 115. [dc]

tw rating 5/5

EVENTS

Yoga Garden

Bristo Yoga School

I probably shouldn't have had a burger and Snickers for lunch before reviewing this, but then again, I didn't expect to be sent to the highest levelled yoga class in existence. I arrived at the venue not knowing what to expect, but the room itself is lovely; it's spacious, clean and dimly lit and you're given a yoga mat while soothing music is played in the background. A gentle American lady with a realging voice leads the session, lulling you

into various yoga positions: the pigeon, the fish and let's not forget the downward facing dog. Well, I couldn't do all the positions, but I will definitely go back to try the beginners class. Now then, who wants an ice cream? Bristo Yoga School, 2 Aug - 5 Sep, times vary, prices vary fpp 165. [cc]

tw rating 4/5

DANCE AND PHYSICAL THEATRE

Be-Dom

When you finish your next can of paint don't casually discard it. Give it to this talented sextet, who seems to view any and every object as part of life's drumkit. Somewhere between a gig and a sketch show, every routine is suffused with an energy and winning charisma that transcends language; Be-Dom take genuine pleasure in finding rhythm from banging any possible surface, including the reclaimed set, the audience, and each other. The gaps between sketches sometimes let the energy flag and the audience participation isn't as integral as you feel it might be, but the cheekiness (and the most surreal Beyonce cover I've ever seen), will make you want to hoard your trash for their next visit.

Udderbelly's Pasture, 5 - 29 August (not 16), 2.00pm (3.00pm), £10.50 - £14.00, fpp 143. [tc]

tw rating 3/5

Intertwine

Collisions Dance Company

We rely on words for our expression, yet the body can speak for itself, as this quartet so elegantly shows: as if being used by the accompanying music their bodies 'spoke' fluently, unencumbered by awkwardness of personality or ego. In formation they displayed symbiosis to perfection. What a shock when, in their fourth and final piece, the tempo changed and each performer became the very personality I had noted was absent, to act out a very weak - and slightly embarrassing - tableau in which they each mimed along to a pop song! This strange and misguided choice of choreography surely detracted from applause which was their due for their previous beautiful and mesmerising performances.

Zoo Roxy, 6 - 28 Aug (not 15, 23), 2.00pm, £5 - £7.50, fpp 149. [cm]

tw rating 3/5

Tap Ole

Tap Ole Company

How can humans move their feet (and fingers) that fast? Tap Ole is a four piece band: two flamenco guitar masters, accompanied by two virtuoso percussionists who happen to use their feet as their instruments, a tight ensemble which moves easily from heart breaking pathos to heart pumping frenzy. Unaccompanied by the two tap dancers, the two guitarists perform several songs including a soulful arrangement of Chick Corea's 'Spain,' and a beautiful rendition of Bach's 'Air on a G String', which the full ensemble gives a spine-tingling performance of 'Asturias'. The dancers' astonishing control of dynamics is matched by their sensitive weaving of complex rhythms against the musical pyrotechnics of the two guitarists. This hot quartet from Barcelona is not to be missed.

C Plaza, 05 - 30 Aug (not 17), 7.15pm, £7.50 - £11.50, fpp 154. [sl]

tw rating 4/5

Phantom Pains

Co Theatre

One creature split in two makes two dancers who still feel the pains where their other half used to be. This Moscow company uses raw, powerful movement in a piece that is by turns harrowing and heartbreaking; without a word, the dancers manage to communicate both the frightening depth of feeling and the small, everyday moments that make up a love story. In such an intimate show it's particularly interesting to see how differing physicality can totally alter the character of a dance, as the two performers echo and reflect one another on the bare stage. 'Phantom Pains' taps into the mythic whilst remaining intensely personal, meaning that it stays with you for a long time after watching.

The Zoo, 6 - 14 Aug (not 10), 9.40pm (10.30pm), £5.00 - £7.00, fpp 152. [crc]

tw rating 4/5

MUSICALS AND OPERA

Sector17

Indigo Co

Blend together a night at 'Laser Quest', some 80s power ballads, a sliver of rock 'n' roll and a dash of 'I am Legend' and you'll have created something like new musical 'Sector17': in a post-apocalyptic world, the inhabitants of Sector17 believe they're the last civilised division on earth, but new discoveries change everything. The young performers sing like seasoned professionals and the solo performances are as strong as the rousing harmonies of the group numbers. Scenes with the sector guards tend to stifle what is otherwise a pacey performance, but the music and vocals easily redeem this - they're that good. Hats off to talented co-writers Sam Barnes and Jack Gayler, aged just 19, for creating an innovative, glow-in-the-dark guilty pleasure.

Greenside, 9 - 14 Aug, 8.00pm (9.10pm), £7.00 - £8.00 (£25.00 F), fpp 217. [gjs]

tw rating 4/5

Rodgers & Hammerstein's Cinderella

American High School Theatre Festival

Cinderella - it's a story we all know, but this lively, well-performed version of the classic fairy tale is worthy of recognition. While there is nothing particularly special about the production itself, there is no faulting the efforts and performances of the clearly enthusiastic cast. There are plenty of laughs (most of them deservedly went to the comical ugly step-sisters), and all the songs were delivered to a high quality. Furthermore, it kept the audience engaged and did not feel too long. Any parent with young children would be insane to give this a miss; well-priced and with only four showings, try going to see this before it's too late.

Church Hill Theatre, 10 - 14 Aug (not 12), times vary, £5.00, fpp 217. [dc]

tw rating 3/5

THEATRE

Death Of A Theatre Critic

Swedish Theatre in Helsinki

If I'd thought every bad review caused as much of an impact as one does in this show, I might have chosen a different career: here, the cutting words of critic Mr Breck torture our director protagonist into frustration, depression and eventually wilful murder. A philosophical exploration of human morality and the theatre industry unfolds, complete with an underlying bleak comedy. Marcus Groth is particularly compelling as the brooding Karlo, adding thought and texture to lines which bounced around my head long after the performance finished. A particularly memorable scene saw the reviewer and director assess their different relationships towards the theatrical world. With not a bad word to say about this production, I should hopefully be safe from murder by director. Pleasance Courtyard, 4 - 30 Aug (not 7, 16), 1.30pm (3.00pm), £5.00 - £11.00, fpp 242. [eg]

tw rating 4/5

Jordan by Anna Reynolds with Moira Buffini

Richard Jordan Productions

Shirley Jones' life was, without doubt, a very modern tragedy, but this production succeeds only in presenting an insistent sob-story. Playing Shirley Jones is the youthful, pretty Allie Croker, who displays endearing physicality, but rarely conveys emotional truth - she's hamstringed by an overly descriptive and profoundly undramatic script. Reynolds and Buffini flatten any liveness with a weighty spread of adjectives, and the metaphors are depressingly obvious. Displaying little balance or perspective, 'Jordan' is an ethical mess, and it's crowned with an ending that is, frankly, exploitative. If this is where big-name writers are taking British theatre, I want nothing to do with it.

Assembly @ George Street, 5 - 30 Aug (not 18), 1.00pm (2.05pm), £10.00 - £12.00, fpp 263. [tm]

tw rating 2/5

Deepchurch Hollow

Slippery Rock Theatre

'Deepchurch Hollow' keeps you nailed on your seat, hoping that some vengeful ghost won't creep up behind your shoulder and whisper in your ear. Played in the round and set in the basement of a gothic house, the play revolves around Alice's hallucinations, which could be visions of a real spirit haunting her childhood house and not her mental illness, as everyone

thinks. It's entertaining, but the script is more suitable for TV and is often melodramatic - the lesbian subtext is unnecessary - while the cast is awkwardly assembled, and even if Jackie Freeman's performance as the bitchy Camille is really convincing, the other actors did not quite get it right.

Venue 45, 6 - 14 Aug (not 8), times vary, £5.00, fpp 243. [clm]

tw rating 3/5

(Don't) Look Back In Anger?

Angry Young Men

John Osborne's 1956 play was an attack on class mores and mediocrity, a response to a directionless post-war generation's distraction by materialism. This 're-imagining' makes an effort to rework those themes, tying them to 21st Century narratives of powerlessness and disaffection. The devised piece features comfortable performances and natural dialogue, but its purpose falters due to lack of dramatic drive. The characters, recast as well-off students, barely identify the social tensions they set out to explore. Chris Thacker's Jimmy is a spoiled sociopath, and it takes more than a soliloquy listing society's ills to convince us of his frustrated intelligence or the validity of his anger. Like the generation it describes, this play hasn't reached its potential.

Sin Club and Lounge, 7 - 15 Aug, 3.10pm (4.00pm), free, fpp 246. [df]

tw rating 2/5

Feeding the Troll

Battersea Park School

Sporting grey hoodies, which cast foreboding shadows over every facial expression, and tapping away on their mobile phones, the cast manage to produce a roomful of ominous, youthful hostility. Set in 2050, this devised piece explores an unrecognisable world where family units are non-existent and have been replaced by rival groups, the 'mascies' and the 'femmies'. The futuristic plot is a tad peculiar, and the 'street' vibe of the piece feels a bit contrived, while the script is filled with text-speak and teenage colloquialisms which are unnecessarily frequent, and dated. However, the valiant young cast is brimming with energy and there are some nifty moves and interesting music choices. It's watchable, but could have been fresher.

The Vault, Aug 9 - 14, 1.05pm (2.05pm), £3.00 - £4.50, fpp 250. [gjs]

tw rating 2/5

Others

Paper Birds

'Others' is an interesting exploration of female identity that nicely balances humour and drama, conveying a message without being overly didactic. The dialogue was excellent and the performances were great: at numerous points the three performers were swapping roles or talking over one another without missing a cue. Unfortunately, the quality of the script and performances was let down by the direction and movement, which felt forced from the substance of the dialogue, undermining the impact of the three talented performers. There is a great play within 'Others', struggling to get out, but for now it's mired in mediocrity, which is a shame.

Pleasance Courtyard, 4 - 29 Aug (not 16), 3.20pm (4.20pm), £7.50 - £10.00, fpp 276. [al]

tw rating 3/5

La Locandiera

Wonderland Productions Ltd

Thespian and culinary treats abound in this unique and playful site-specific production of Goldoni's classic Italian comedy, which takes place in Edinburgh's stylish Vittoria Restaurant. The audience find themselves in the midst of the action, tucking into their dinner as lively banter and sword fights literally surround them. The talented cast of six - most notably, Damien O'Donnell (Fabrizio/The Manservant) - establish a great rapport with the audience, skilfully transforming the intimate space into an eighteenth-century Florentine inn, and bursting now and then into joyous song. Eccentric characters, live music and a witty script coupled with creative staging and inspired direction by Alice Coghlan make for a memorable theatrical experience; we piled out of the venue with full bellies and full hearts.

Assembly @ Vittoria Restaurant, 4 - 30 Aug (not 16, 23), times vary, £29.50 - £36.50 (includes meal), fpp 265. [hm]

tw rating 4/5

The Master And Margarita

Oxford University Dramatic Society

Sometimes, even if you mix together wonderful things, your end-product still smells funny. This is the case with 'The Master And Margarita,' which blends together acting, song and dance with a scripted version of the famous novel. Although in theory there is no reason why this shouldn't work, in practice, it simply doesn't. Part of the reason for that is that the cast don't know really how to sing or dance properly (the only notable exception being the piano-playing cat). The acting is realistic, but some moments resemble film noir and I couldn't see why. There is no clear directorial vision and no real consistency, and although it's a good story and even, at times, an interesting performance, I was not convinced.

C soco, 6 - 30 Aug, 10.30pm (11.40pm), £7.50 - £10.50, fpp 270. [ms]

tw rating 2/5

My Hamlet With Linda Marlowe

Watford Palace Theatre

Linda Marlowe stars in her one-woman 'Hamlet,' with the help of an assortment of puppets and five talented puppeteers. She provides the voice for all the puppets, bouncing effortlessly between the bravado-infused voice of the murderous king and the queen's silky lies. Hamlet himself, embodied by Ms. Marlowe, doesn't know who to trust and even the set itself is not what it seems: a dressing room mirror becomes a stage, and cabinet drawers become coffins. Indeed, the props, puppets and the set work nearly as hard as the captivating actress at the centre of it all. This is as clever and engaging a Hamlet as you will find anywhere.

Assembly @ George Street, 5 - 29 Aug (not 14, 24), 5.20pm (6.35pm), £5.00 - £12.00, fpp 273. [sl]

tw rating 4/5

Laura

Spun Glass Theatre

This heart warming and moving show inspired by 'The Glass Menagerie' follows the delicate heroine Laura, distressingly shy and easily broken. The honesty of this piece is what truly succeeds in capturing its audience, whilst the careful balance of character construction keeps the chemistry between the two actors vivid. The performance starts slowly with a Beckettian reflection on the frustration of Laura, and it's a shame that the effect is diminished by distractions from the next door show. Nevertheless, poetic imagery and a beautiful score keep our attention and, when the rhythm of the elegant writing is picked up, the relationship between characters is entrancing. Expertly directed and featuring Marie Rabe's insightful interpretation of Laura, this show is adorable. A true gem of the Free Fringe.

Laughing Horse @ The Hive, 5 - 29 Aug (not 9, 16, 23), 1.45pm (2.30pm), free, fpp 266. [ge]

tw rating 4/5

Private Peaceful

Beacon Theatre Group

A dilemma faces the reviewer of any show where the cast is made up entirely of children. I mean, they're only about ten years old, they're trying so hard and they're usually really really cute, but, generally, they're just not very good actors. Especially when, as in 'Private Peaceful', the play's subject matter of pain, loss and the futility of war seems to require a level of emotional maturity that these kids understandably can't muster, although the production does at times harness their waif-like innocence and angelic voices to poignant effect. Waves of parental approval radiate from the audience, but unless you're related to any of these youngsters, there's no particular reason to seek out this drama school endeavour.

Augustine's, 8 - 14 Aug, times vary, £6.50 - £8.00, fpp 281. [ac]

tw rating 3/5

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