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CABARET

Eat Your Heart Out

In an explosion of glittery chaos, this riotous cabaret delivers a fabulous taste of contemporary performance art, and reaffirms my faith in the Fringe as an alternative arts platform. It would be impossible to provide an appropriate overview of the myriad performers, but suffice to say there are some challenging physical performances, a few songs, and enough variety in the acts to satisfy any performance-lover. Most of the night is handled with an excellent sense of humour - our host Scottee, as technical problems persisted, gamely shouted: "Well, at least we don't have a reviewer in!" Smart, anarchic, and rarely self indulgent; if you are at all interested in having a rounded Fringe experience, this is a must-see.

C Aquila, 9 - 22 Aug (not 16, 17, 18), 12.00am (1.50am), £7.50 - £9.50, fpp 248. [tm]

tw rating 4/5

COMEDY

Creatures Susan Harrison

Absolutely minute, with pixie-like features and bright red hair, Susan Harrison resembles a folkloric creature herself, even without the pair of butterfly wings attached to her back. Yet there's nothing ethereal about this distinctive show, in which Harrison, posing as an organiser of the "Annual Creatures Meeting", presents a succession of memorable characters from a subculture of non-human beings, including an extremely plummy unicorn and a drug-addled Borrower. With its juxtaposition of the mundane and the fantastical, 'Creatures' is a bit like an episode of 'The Office' set in fairyland, with razor sharp wit and apt social observation brilliantly displaced onto a surreal setting. Smart and original absurdist comedy.

theSpace on Mile@Jury's Inn, 6 - 28 Aug (not 08, 22), times vary, £5.00 - £6.00, fpp 50. [ac]

tw rating 4/5

Bruce Fumme - Nothing In Particular

Fumme calls this free show the 'cheap bastard version' of one that you might pay for - and he's right. As there is no prepared material, the show becomes spontaneous, casual, a series of half-improvised anecdotes fuelled by audience response. We are encouraged to move closer to him and huddle, which creates intimacy and a warm, friendly atmosphere that is sustained throughout the show. Fumme even invites a starting-out comedienne to the microphone for five minutes, generously but unnecessarily. An engaging and lively conversationalist, he rarely falls flat, however much material is taken from his own middle aged Scottish life, limiting its appeal. Nonetheless, it is well worth seeing this Afro-Celtic comedian for free.

Laughing Horse @ The Counting House, 12 - 29 Aug, 10.00pm (11.00pm), free, fpp 38. [jc]

tw rating 3/5



SNAP OF THE DAY: Peter Straker belts out those showtunes and pop classics at The Pleasance at Ghillie Dhu each day - look, here he is, belting out as we speak. Photo: Kate Edwards

Checkley Bush

A great collection of characters is created in this very clever sketch show. The ability displayed by both performers to so rigidly and brilliantly stick to their assumed personae, portraying even the most subtle of personality traits, really sold them to me. These mannerisms, and the script, are hilarious, plus, there's an added bonus: 'TV shows' shown on a screen between scenes, which helped the programme of sketches flow smoothly. The slow start and my initial anxiety were very much put to bed once the first few characters - who obtained fewer and cheaper laughs - were out of the way. To put it simply, these two women are very funny, and definitely should be ringed in the Fringe Programme with a little note saying "book tickets asap".

Gilded Balloon Teviot - Bristo Square, 4-30 Aug, 2.30pm (3.30pm), £7.50 - £9.50, fpp 43. [tv]

tw rating 4/5

Hi, How Can I Help You? - Free

Scout Durwood

Scout Durwood is a charismatic performer with an attractive, smoky voice, and shines in this musical story of sex workers in New York on election night, 2008. The catchy songs are composed spontaneously through a series of live-recorded loops and would have provided great entertainment if the tech hadn't failed so disastrously. Of the entire show, it is these kind of feats that really impress: the live construction of a musical score is fascinating and the performance of multiple characters while on roller-skates equally so. Despite Durwood's disarming

manner, however, the script is frustratingly 'American' - jokes about therapy and bipartisan government fall flat, and its political charge diffuses quite harmlessly over here. Good, if not great, musical character comedy. Laughing Horse @ Cafe Renroc, 6 - 29 Aug (not 11, 18, 25), 9.15pm (10.15pm), free, fpp 258. [tm]

tw rating 3/5

The Brothers Streep EdCom

It seems South Africa is not so different to the UK after all - we are equally violently opposed to people with too many items being in the express queue at Tesco's. The Brothers Streep will charm your socks off with their gentle humour through songs that cover subjects as diverse as Disney princesses and trampolines [appealingly entitled 'No Springs Attached']. There is also cultural education - we learn about the South African answer to Yazoo, the Loch Ness Monster and how vuvuzelas are the new apartheid. The songs often get chuckles rather than out-and-out laughs, but the warm atmosphere these two create make this a thoroughly enjoyable hour - and you come out with something to sing at those pesky inappropriate queuers.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, 4 - 29 August (not 16), 6.15pm (7.15pm), £7.50-£9.50, fpp 38. [tc]

tw rating 3/5

It Is Rocket Science! V2 Helen Keen

Putting on a good show at the fringe? Well, it is rocket science actually. Armed only with a flip chart, a giant paper rocket, and her best friend's puppetry skills, the charmingly witty Ms Keen, in an ingenious journey through

space and time, proves not only this, but many fascinating and funny things about rockets. Held together with a few pieces of string and sellotape, much like the Soviet space programme as Helen herself suggests, this comedy come lecture performance shows just how far vision and sticky tape can take you. Experience the space race for yourself! Thrill to never-before-seen explanatory diagrams! Forget Patrick Moore, I would like this lady to be in charge of telling me about everything.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, 6 - 30 Aug (not 10), 1.15 pm (2.15 pm), £5.00 - £9.50, fpp 73. [es]

tw rating 4/5

John Moloney in 'Butterflies with Stretchmarks'

John Moloney/ The Stand Comedy Club

Usually housed in Balham with his stressed cat, John Moloney has travelled north to present this gem of a show. With twenty years' worth of experience, Moloney is one of the most relaxed and effortlessly funny comedians I have seen; his natural charm, innate dry wit and casual delivery style make almost anything comic. He tells tidbits from everyday life - things that would ordinarily make for a dull narrative but in this case seem extremely funny - like the joys of darts, having nothing to say to long-term friends and the noises that push people make at dinner parties. This comedian won't change your life, but he will make you laugh.

The Stand Comedy Club II, 6 - 29 (not 16), 21.00, £8.00 - £10.00, fpp 80. [sk]

tw rating 4/5

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Success: A Success Story
Kieran & The Joes/ PBH's Free Fringe
“I am a pigeon, you are a pigeon. We are all pigeons!” Brilliant, engaging and hilarious, this David Brent inspired trio performs a comedy sketch show with a difference. Using a flip chart as their only aid, the team teaches the audience the secrets to success; including how to cope in a plane crash, the pitfalls of chocolate tasting and an in-depth explanation of the game of chess. Equally entertaining is the interaction between the trio: Ferocious competition between the two company directors along with the inane stupidity of their newest member provides plenty of laughs, framing the sketches brilliantly. With a simple set, superb performers and some beautiful dolphin music, this free show is fantastically funny.
The Voodoo Rooms, 9 – 17 Aug, 15:40 (16:40), free, ffp 127. [sk]
tw rating 5/5

Twins
Hannah Warman & Joanne Lau/ Laughing Horse Free Festival

Hannah Warman and Joanne Lau are not each other’s twin – Lau is Canadian Chinese and Warman is a London Jew – the girls are actually friends who both have a twin sibling; an interesting premise, but disappointingly each comedienne delivers her own set. Unfortunately too few punch-lines led to a lack of audience reaction which affected the girls significantly; both resorted to self-deprecation, and their material became disorganised as they lost faith in what they were saying. It’s a shame that the twins didn’t interact more with each other and perhaps make the show more of a double act, as their personas were endearing and they even gave out biscuits at the beginning, but nibbles I’m afraid, are not enough for giggles.

Laughing Horse @ Espionage, 6 – 30 Aug, 12.15 pm (1.15pm), free, fpp 136. [cc]
tw rating 2/5

The Leeds Tealights: For Your Sins

This is a really bright example of University sketch comedy. The Tealights admittedly took a few minutes to warm up and get the show off the ground, but soon found their feet with some really brilliant material. As the pace quickened and the actors settled down, the show began to give the strong impression of being improvised, as scripted dialogue seemed so off-the-cuff and fresh in its delivery. At the start, swayed by a slightly tepid opening, I had not expected much, but my first impressions were dashed, and I was left reeling as the show proceeded at maximum velocity and just kept getting better. Truly great stuff from the Leeds Tealights, who more than earned their tumultuous applause.

Underbelly, 7 – 29 Aug (not 16), £6.50 - £10.00, fpp 87. [mb]
tw rating 4/5

Mike Wozniak: Egg And Spoon

Stand Comedy Club/Just For Laughs Live

If you like your comedians deadpan and with a moustache, I can confidently recommend Mike Wozniak, who fully delivers on both fronts. Wozniak’s comments on the nonsensical nature of conception are inspired, but his language alone (think words such as ‘nipper’, which makes sense, and ‘squaz’, which doesn’t) is enough to give you value for money. Perhaps it’s because Wozniak is utterly charming, but the audience when I go is unwilling to heckle. If you go along be sure to give him a harder time, as he outdoes himself when playing off the audience. One can only hope Wozniak is successful in his ambition to produce a ‘nipper’ – it would be a shame for this comic gene to die out.

The Stand Comedy Club III & IV, 6 – 15, 17 – 29 Aug, 9.10pm, £7.00 - £8.00, fpp 98. [lw]
tw rating 4/5

Rule of Three: The Sketch-Com
Rule of Three

These three actors move with eerie fluidity through their horde of various characters, and remain dependably, effortlessly funny throughout the show, which incorporates multiple situational sketches into a single storyline. The sketches are snappy and nicely timed, although I can’t help but wish the actors’ considerable talents were used on better material; here it drifts occasionally into the predictable and tired. Particular acknowledgement is due to James Card, whose performance as the feckless, friendless Simon includes one of the most credible drunk scenes I’ve ever seen at the Fringe or anywhere. The miniature walk-on roles are re-

freshing in their absurdity and inject fat doses of laughter into this neat and accomplished comedy. Well-structured and well-received.

Underbelly, 11 – 17, 19 – 29 Aug, 2.55pm, £8.00 - £10.00, fpp 118. [kb]
tw review 3/5

Stuart Goldsmith: The Reasonable Man
CKP by Arrangement With Red Company
Everybody beware. Stuart Goldsmith has puppy dog eyes. But unlike some comedians who would love you and leave you, he proves to be ideal husband material, producing comedy that is consistently, dependably and utterly funny. Like potential husbands, I judge a comedian by their image and Goldsmith’s grey posters suggested this show might be little more than a dull first date. On the contrary, his understated front reflects a sense of humour that is clever and honest, without fuss or gimmick; he entices response without testing the reserved, and clearly has a talent for warming up the timid. His puppy dog eyes may lead you to a heavenly comic union and, fulfilling that promise, his stories will keep you there.
Pleasance Dome, 4 – 29 Aug (not 18), 7.30pm (8.25pm), £5.00 - £9.50, fpp127. [cnm]
tw rating 5/5

DANCE AND PHYSICAL THEATRE

The Dream of Sancho
Creative VaQi

This is a tremendous production. A word-less Sancho Panza reminds a lost modern-day Quixote of his inner chivalry by visiting his dreams and showing him a colossal technicalour escapade, created in this new outdoor venue with spinning umbrella-dances and glorious, anarchic backdrops, projected magnificently onto a vast brick building. This is a show of unrivalled, unpretentious innovation. The cast are consistently swift and vibrant and the simple plot is beaten out with such rhythmic soul and romance that even newcomers to the Quixote tale cannot but be stirred and spellbound. There are, in fact, lessons for life here, which tell us that the barriers of lacklustre modern existence are not unassailable, and the Quixotic in everyone can still be released.

C, 10 – 14 Aug, 9.50pm, £7.50 - £11.50, fpp 146. [kb]
tw rating 5/5

(No) Living Room

alKamie Theatre

Billed as surreal and quirky, this performance certainly lives up to that expectation. A single dancer moves in and out of a virtual set created by projected images that switch from black and white footage of wastelands to a colourful cartoon summer. The transient nature of our existence is further alluded to with clever use of sound bites from politicians, evidently warning of the apocalypse. Inventive, and an interesting example of this art form, not least for its topic, but I thought the dancer seemed to be if not superfluous then wasted; she was somewhat lost in the innovation of the set and notwithstanding the subject, I don’t think this was intended. Amusing for half an hour, but surely not accessible to everyone.

The Zoo, 6 – 30 Aug (not 18, 25), 19.25, £5 - £7.50, fpp 151. [cm]
tw rating 3/5

THEATRE

The Door
Unfit Productions
This is a highly provocative piece that leads the audience on an emotional and intellectual journey. Beginning in a waiting room where two men self-consciously complain about a banging door, ‘The Door’ quickly progresses to discussions of politics and religion between two characters on the opposite ends of the social spectrum. Masterfully written, the plot gradually unravels more and more information about their relationship. The use of a grumbling refrain about the banging door is a clever indication of a change in subject or tone on the road toward an evocative climax. An insightful production with unbounded depth of meaning, ‘The Door’ presents a blissful marriage between a fascinating script and captivating acting. A must see.
Gilded Balloon Teviot, 7 - 29 Aug, 12.30pm (1.20pm), £8.50 - £10.50, fpp 246. [sh]
tw rating 5/5

Pedal Pusher

TheatreDelicatessen

Without seeing this play, I might never have known how dramatic competitive cycling can be. Following the experiences of famous cyclists in their bid to win the Tour De France, ‘Pedal Pushers’ makes a niche sport into exhilarating physical theatre. The use of chairs to imitate bicycles was an imaginative way of bringing the races to life, and the actors communicated the emotions of the racers admirably, especially the actor playing Lance Armstrong, who was mesmerising as he described his journey from champion to cancer patient. Although slightly long for a Fringe show, the audience is not given the chance to get bored. The simplicity of the set and lighting made this feel like a live action documentary, definitely worth a watch.

Zoo Roxy, 6 – 30 Aug (not 15,22), 4.00pm (5.30pm), £8.00 - £12.00, fpp. 278. [sj]
tw rating 4/5

The Moira Monologues
Alan Bissett and Sacha Kyle
If you haven’t heard of author and playwright Alan Bissett before, you might be forgiven for presuming his ‘one woman show’ would be some kind of outlandish drag queen act. Such assumptions will be shattered when he saunters on stage; casually dressed, he instantly adopts subtly feminine mannerisms, embodying the boisterous, opinionated, chain-smoking single mother Moira. In a series of razor-sharp and dexterously executed monologues, Bissett nails Moira’s psyche, sending the packed, and mostly Scottish audience into peals of hearty laughter. One warning – Bissett’s exceptionally strong Scottish accent might be a struggle for non-Scots to grasp, and words and phrases were occasionally lost on me. Nevertheless, this is a refreshingly unique and biting satirical act from a talented man.
National Library of Scotland, 10 – 21 Aug (not 14, 15), 7.00pm (8.10pm), £6.00 - £8.00, fpp. 272. [qjs]
tw rating 4/5

All The Queen’s Children

Nothing To Declare In Association With Reading Youth Theatre

Following the lives of four young refugees and their experiences of arriving in Britain, this piece tries to cram too many concepts into an already confused storyline. The approach to the major theme of immigration felt over worked and exaggerated and the excess of characters prevented the performance from having a clear focus. Despite this, there were some imaginative elements of physical theatre, especially the use of a white cloth and choreographed movement to represent the ocean. The play featured some promising performances from the young cast, most notably those playing the separated sisters. Overall, some moments of brilliance were overshadowed by a poor script, crowded stage and heavy handed direction.
C Aquila, 7 – 14 Aug, 4.50pm, £7.50 - £9.50, fpp 224. [sj]
tw rating 3/5

Angel City

Peculius Stage

This rarely performed Sam Shepard play takes a bizarrely fascinating look at the movie industry and the lure of the silver screen. It’s a brilliant and hallucinatory script, and the very talented cast do well in their roles; as an ensemble, they build a sense of mounting pressure and tension, making us wonder which of the characters will be the first to snap. The staging is very clunky in places, which causes some confusion and often makes the pace falter, but from drums to nuns to producers growing scales, this dystopian world is always absorbing. They had a full house last night, so book ahead.
theSpaces on the Mile @ The Radisson, 6 - 21 Aug (not 8, 15), 9.00pm (10.00pm), £5.00 - £8.00, ffp 226. [crc]
tw rating 3/5

The City And Iris

Glass-Eye Theatre

Charming from the start with its inventive physicality, Glass-Eye create a whole world for myopic, neurotic Iris. Ignored and bored with routine, the performers decide to reignite her lost sense of wonder, using sight and sound to transform her monotonous, monotone life into an adventure featuring library-dwelling dinosaurs, psychotic opticians and ducks plotting kidnap. Somehow staying just the right side of cutesey, this show is like an intensely physical take on ‘Amelie’, full of imagery that’s instantly recognisable but surprisingly fresh. Their evocations of the everyday are well

observed, and spot-on sound effects - including a beautiful, chanted ‘theme tune’ - conjure a joyful, dreamlike mood. This has all the imagination needed to captivate the curious kid in you.

Zoo Roxy, 6 - 30 Aug (not 23), 6.25pm (7.25pm), £5.00 - £7.50, fpp 238. [df]
tw rating 4/5

Djupid (The Deep)
Labrador

Based on a real-life event, this intense 45 minute play is an acting masterclass from Liam Brennan, shifting from the gentle day-to-day storytelling to the catastrophic situation in which his character finds himself as his ship begins to sink. This is where the play really takes off – Brennan creates a real sense of claustrophobia and contrasts the terror of the ship to the relief of his imagined last hours, which are movingly played out. If the play has a fault, it is the immediately frenetic pace which makes the start almost unintelligible, but this soon settles. Brennan and Graeme Maley have created a short but striking meditation on mortality.

Underbelly, Cowgate, 5 – 29 August (not 17), 5.50pm (6.35pm), £6.50 - £10.50 fpp 245. [fc]
tw rating 3/5

Cirque de Légume
Aurora Nova Productions
If you’re up for 50 minutes of vegetable slapstick and idiocy, then Cirque de Légume is the show for you. Two clowns put on a circus act with only the aid of a chair and some vegetables, and rush through a series of sketches, some of which are genuinely funny, some of which carry on a bit too long. The final turn, however, featuring a striptease onion, was simply brilliant, and proved that even the most pedestrian of vegetables can be sexy. The real strength of the show is in the chemistry between Jaimie Carswell and Nancy Trotter Landry, whose comic power is increased by the awkwardly tiny stage. Although repetitive, the show is enjoyable, sometimes hysterical, and suitable for both children and adults.
Gilded Balloon, 4-30 Aug (not 16), 2:30 p.m., £ 5.00 - £ 10.00, fpp 238. [clm]
tw rating 3/5

Colours

Murungu Productions

Set in southern Africa, this play centres upon one woman visiting her late husband’s graveside, where she shares her current circumstances and remembers their past life together. Whilst the set seemed fairly basic it was the richness of the script that somewhat redeemed this altogether confused production. One of the main downsides, however, was that the character was so over exaggerated that it often managed to undermine the script completely, but also, the piece lacked a solid conclusion; I was left wondering whether the purpose of the play was simply to expose the living conditions for women in Africa or something entirely different, and I’m afraid to say I’m still no closer to finding out.
Assembly @ Assembly Hall, 5 - 29 Aug, 10.50am (11.50am), £5.00 - £11.00, fpp 239. [et]
tw rating 2/5

Hamlet, The End Of A Childhood
Naxos Theatre & Les Trefeaux de la Pleine Lune
Never has a teddy bear seemed more grave, or more deserving of its applause, than at the end of this childhood re-framing of Hamlet. As a child hiding from his new stepfather, Thomas Marceul uses the scattered toys in his room to create a mesmerising performance. It is a feat of endurance; alone on stage throughout, the sweat drips off his face, so intense is his characterisation, so that even the pillows representing the royals gain a genuine emotive force. The outside world is only slightly explored, but as the piece goes on we see the progressive impact of the story on the narrator. A clever, creative and moving interpretation. And a uniquely talented teddy bear.
The Zoo, 6-30 August, 3.10pm (4.30pm), £7.00 - £9.00, fpp 257. [tc]
tw rating 4/5

Hit Me: The Life and Rhymes of Ian Dury
Festival Highlights in Association with Gilded Balloon Productions
Apart from the infectious ‘Hit Me With Your Rhythm Stick’, I wasn’t familiar with singer Ian Dury’s work, but by the end of this play I was mesmerised by the depiction of a flawed charismatic rogue and self styled citizen’s poet. ‘Hit Me’ tells the entertaining and moving story of Dury’s childhood blighted by polio and his subsequent rise to musical stardom. Well

acted throughout, never once does this hour and a half show feel like it’s outstaying its welcome. This is partly due to the peppering of musical numbers that break the tension of Dury’s powerful monologues and celebrate his music beyond the limits of any tribute act. A sublime denouement inspired satisfied whoops and cheers from the audience.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, 4 – 30, 3.00pm (4.30pm), £9.00 - £11.00, fpp 258 [r]
tw rating 4/5

The Resistable Rise Of Arturo Ui
Braindead Theatre Company

Brecht’s ever-relevant 1941 satire transports Hitler’s rise to power along the path of least resistance to a gangster-infested 30s Chicago. Braindead take this idea and run with it – but not very far. Their version is a dark pantomime, unfolding to a crackling jazz soundtrack as the strutting chorus dances a fascist Charleston. Nice physical touches and committed performances enliven the show; most notably Lauren Whittingham’s scene-stealing turn as grotesque, grinning G (for Goering, get it?). Unfortunately the cluttered staging is distracting, heavy-handed Nazi imagery detracts from the otherwise neat design, and the show feels packed with too many ideas. This energetic company would do better to let their performance speak for itself.

C Central, 5-14 Aug, 8.45pm (9.50pm), £7.50 - £10.50, fpp 282. [df]
tw rating 3/5

The Hunchback of Notre Dame
Pip Utton
Darkly enthralling and utterly heart breaking, this arresting one man show is more evocative than any I have seen. Pip Utton masterfully delivers a hauntingly realistic portrayal of a man who has been so hurt by the cruelties endured due to his disfigurements, that he plans to fall to his death from the top of Notre Dame. However this poignant climax is only reached once we have been privy to Quasimodo’s life story. Actor and script converge to form a character whose depth of pain, sorrow, and anger are almost overwhelming; each word is loaded with a depth of meaning that is unflinching. A one man masterpiece; if you see nothing else at the Fringe, you must witness this.

Pleasance Courtyard, 6- 29 Aug (not 17), 3.15pm, £7.00- £10.00, fpp 260. [sh]
tw rating 5/5

The Inconsiderate Aberrations Of Billy The Kid
2headedpigeon Theatre Company
‘Rocky Horror’ meets ‘The Waltons’ in this foul-mouthed glam rock musical. When Billy murders his mother, the scene is set for a gloriously trashy send up of small town America; expect bad taste and high camp, as well as a few lesbian angels. The humour is utterly sick, but don’t worry because you’ll be choking with laughter as you gag. The all-singing, all-dancing cast is also universally brilliant, and where else would you find yourself held at gunpoint because an actor accuses you of staring at his crotch (I really, really wasn’t)? If you’ve got delicate sensibilities give this a miss, but for everyone else it’s a fantastic piece of Grindhouse grotesque.
Bedlam Theatre, 6 - 28 Aug, 10.30pm (11.30pm), £5.00 - £7.00, fpp 262. [crc]
tw rating 5/5

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