

# ThreeWeeks IN EDINBURGH

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## CHILDREN'S SHOWS

### Cautionary Tales

Newbury Youth Theatre

We enter a cold and angular, grey courtroom, overseen by a trio of crusty and moustachioed judges. Eventually, they lead in a procession of impish youths, whose collective interests vary from lying, to eating wood, to pushing objects up their nostrils. The ensemble then re-enact the fate that befell the last naughty child to push a crayon up their hooter, and so on. The performances are absolutely delightful, so engaging and entertaining that you could re-watch the play again and again, focusing on a different actor every time. The set, costume and make-up all capture the sense of the macabre, creating a perfect balance between eerie environment and enthralling performances. Such a shame they're not here for longer.

Zoo Roxy, 11 - 14 Aug, 12.45pm (1.45pm), £6.00 - £8.00, fpp 9. [np]

tw rating 5/5

### Penguin

Long Nose Puppets

How I wish I'd been lucky enough to see 'Penguin' as a child. Opening a present, adorable Ben discovers Penguin inside; he's delighted - until he discovers Penguin won't speak. Adapted from Polly Dunbar's popular book, the show features gorgeously plush puppets and colourful projections, plus an original soundtrack by Tom Gray. The part where Ben fires Penguin into space to make him "say something" is a magical routine, featuring fluorescent aliens with dancing googly eyes and endlessly springy legs, and makes the children stare in awe. Although the lion's appearance caused a few wails from younger kids, this is a sweet, smart show. You can even meet Ben and Penguin at the end - and I enjoyed it so much I stopped to natter.

Pleasance Courtyard, 4 - 29 Aug (not 17), 11.20am (12.20am), £5.00 - £8.00, fpp 15. [gjs]

tw rating 4/5

## COMEDY

### Mick Ferry - The Missing Chippendale (Body Issues)

CKP By Arrangement With Comedy Store Management

Mick Ferry is the comedy equivalent of a leather armchair: comfortable, quite traditional and, as he explores in this show, squashy. Inspired by the comedian's last Edinburgh show - when he faced competition from noisy Chippendale fans in the next room - this is a leisurely saunter along some well-trodden paths with a man who was probably doing stand up before Thomas Chippendale started making cabinets. He covers Ugg boots, the logistics of going to the loo if you happen to have massive 'lats' and the trials and tribulations of being an overweight middle-aged man. It is enjoyable if unremarkable, until its last few minutes, that is, when Ferry supplies us with a haunting



**SNAP OF THE DAY:** Be-Dom at the Udderbelly Pasture Photo: David Haggerton

final image that leaves very little to the imagination.

Just The Tonic at the Caves, 5 - 29 Aug (not 17), 8.50pm (9.45pm), £7.00 - £9.50, fpp 97. [gg]

tw rating 3/5

### Funny As Muck - Free

Merseyside Uncut Comedy Kollektive/PBH's Free Fringe

Jonny Addy bounds onto the stage and starts gabbing away about waking up that morning in Glasgow. We may have no idea if his story is true or not, but either way it's comedy gold from this brilliant compère, and you'd be forgiven for worrying that this show has peaked too soon. It hasn't. Each of the five other comedians are outrageously entertaining, although for a Liverpoolian comedy showcase there are an awful lot of Mancunians and Kiwis in the line-up. Alongside the typical Scottish jokes about deep-fried food there is plenty of filth, and the acts are especially quick to say something disgusting and then challenge the assumptions underlying the audience's reaction to it. Good dirty fun!

Bannermans, 7 - 28 Aug, 3.00pm (4.00pm), free, fpp 66. [ll]

tw rating 4/5

### Chris Ramsey: Aggrophobic

Avalon Promotions Ltd

Chris Ramsey is a grinning Geordie with a side fringe. While these are all individually potentially irritating traits, here they come together to form a fast-rising star. His show is based on the premise that he is terrified of aggression in all its forms, yet he exudes confidence and self-awareness reminiscent of the Russells Kane and Howard. He can be as uncomfortable as wearing a tracksuit to a wedding, but is never ineffective, like prune

juice in uncomfortable situations (all will be explained, never fear). He has his rambling moments, but he manages to steer his thought train back on course just before I start compiling a grocery list in my head. This is a very strong Fringe debut; that big grin could get him places.

Pleasance Courtyard, 4 - 30 Aug, 8.30pm (9.30pm), £5.00 - £9.50, fpp 45. [cnm]

tw rating 4/5

### How to Be an Imaginary Friend

Z Theatre Company

This piece is seemingly suffering from an acute identity crisis; it's like an episode of a tedious children's sitcom feebly re-packaged into an incompetent, feebly sexual comedy for over sixteens. Aged twenty-five, protagonist Ben still has the companionship of imaginary pal Captain Kilowatt, a caped superhero figure who annoyingly and arrogantly hinders Ben's dating techniques more than he enhances them. Patchily acted at best, it's filled with crass jokes which go down like lead balloons with most of the audience, and the characterisation of the 'Imaginary Friends Institution' members is rather arbitrary and immaturely stereotypical. The leads make wholly unconvincing twenty-somethings, and the design and direction are so sloppy everything presented could feasibly have been cobbled together in a day.

theSpace @ Venue 45, 9 - 19 Aug (not 15), 3.10pm (4.00pm), £3.50, fpp 70. [gjs]

tw rating 1/5

### Charmed Forces

'Watch out for jokes, they may be dotted throughout the show,' Liz, one third of Charmed Forces, warns us as the show begins. She isn't lying, as the hilarity that

ensues bears testament. The other two thirds of the trio, David and Neville, complete a cast who tackle a range of complementary and amusing characters, romping through different scenes, from a 'Rats: The Musical' preview to a phonetic alphabet serenade. Destroying the fourth wall of sketch comedy, the three interact extensively with the audience in a way that is never intimidating, so much so that the entire audience joins in a raucous chorus of the 'Charmed Forces' song. Occasionally good ideas do not fully reach their comic potential, but laughter here is guaranteed.

Just the Tonic at the Caves, 5 - 29 Aug (not 23), 2.00pm (3.00pm), £5.00 - £7.00, fpp 44.

tw rating: 4/5

### Obie: Using the Force - Free

Obie

With a strong Glaswegian accent and a red bull in hand, Obie cuts a likeable, if slightly scary, figure as he requests that we welcome him with rapturous applause and a rendition of the A Team's theme tune. He builds a warm affinity with a small, but responsive audience, getting to know each of us by name and high fiving us when we say something he approves of. His brazen routine is rather mixed - an iffy batch of one-liners, decent wisecracks about texting your ex when drunk and an improvised, devilishly perverse interactive story that shows off his impressively sharp photographic memory. Some parts are scrappy, but overall this is an amusing free hour of fiendish, self-deprecating banter.

Laughing Horse @ Espionage, 6 - 29 Aug (not 9, 16, 23), 8.00pm (9.00pm), free, fpp 106. [gjs]

tw rating 3/5

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## The Penny Dreadfuls

Draw HQ

With hilarious one off scenes interwoven with various recurring storylines, 'The Penny Dreadfuls' have created yet another highly intelligent production. The versatility of their acting combined with their obvious talent for comedy meant that it wasn't just the sketches themselves that were well crafted. The fluidity of the scenes with their impeccable timing meant that none of the jokes were lost on the captivated audience, whilst their inventive use of the available props added to the drollery. Highlights include a very well done parody of the 'Twilight' films that included lyrics taken straight from Eminem, and continuing subtle pleas to buy their t-shirts, in what was a highly enjoyable show.

Pleasance Courtyard, 4 - 29 Aug (not 17), 6.00pm (6.55pm), £5.00 - £14.00, fpp 108. [aq]

tw rating 4/5

## Jimmy McGhie - The All-Powerful Warrior Who With His Endurance And Inflexible Will To Win Goes From Conquest to Conquest Leaving Fire In His Wake

Avalon Promotions Ltd

Write what you know, they say, and McGhie has done exactly that with this routine.

Jimmy - he of the unfeasibly long show title - relays the day-to-day life of a comic with a manic charm, which is an instant hit with the audience. He leaps around the stage, a ball of energy and wit, keeping us entertained with observational comedy and not-racist-honest impressions. There is a savage truthfulness to his material, and dazzling glimpses of the outstanding comic he will one day become; for now though, his routine is a little safe. For a while, it was interesting hearing about the mundanity of his day-to-day routine, but to really shine, McGhie needs to up the ante and challenge himself.

Pleasance Courtyard, 4 - 30 Aug, 9.45pm (10.45pm), £7.00 - £9.50, fpp 78. [al]

tw rating 3/5

## Rosie Wilby - Further Science Of Sex

"What's love got to do with it?" Tina Turner asks as we take our seats: not very much by the sound of things. Rosie Wilby has returned to the Fringe to further educate audiences on the joy, and damned lack of the joy of sex. During the course of her show - part science lesson, part sex therapy - the stark truth is laid bare: sex is more to do with chemicals and gender differences than fluffy notions like love. The sensitive material is expertly handled by a performer clearly competent at maintaining great pace and humour, and who makes even graphic graphic discussions not awkward. Entertaining and educational - why were biology lessons never this fun at school?

Underbelly, 5 - 29 Aug (not 16), 4.15pm (5.05pm), £6.50 - £10.00, fpp 117. [lj]

tw rating 3/5

## Tom Craine - From Choirboy To Addict And Back Again

Bound And Gagged Comedy

Former head-chorister Tom Craine is the definition of affable and has a deft touch with the crowd, though his set could do with fine-tuning. It starts promisingly, as he draws on his background in developmental psychology to say we shouldn't be so quick to let go the things that made us happy as children. He then drifts into some gentle observations about naps and vegetables that, although saved from banality by some lovely word choices, confuse his theme, giving the impression he was unable to sustain it for a whole hour, and making the ending seem unsatisfying. With a little bit of structural reinforcement this could be an excellent show, but it is currently more autobiography than comedy.

Pleasance Courtyard, 4 - 30 Aug (not 11, 18), 6.00pm (7.00pm), £9.50 - £12.00, fpp 134. [gg]

tw rating 3/5

## DANCE AND PHYSICAL THEATRE

### My Name Is Margaret Morris

Stuart Hopps

Sweet and well-written, this monologue by choreographer Stuart Hopps ticks along nicely, but won't seriously impress anyone. More of a lecture than a piece of dance, Hopps delivers a biographical account of actor/dancer/choreographer/physiotherapist Margaret Morris, apparently something of a doyenne of the dance world. She certainly lived a fascinating life, full of affairs, fallouts, and a [conjectured] rivalry with dance titan Martha Graham, whose dance method competed with Margaret's own. There's lots of name-dropping, but it's delivered with such heart that you won't begrudge it. 'My Name Is Margaret Morris' is an informative forty-five minutes, but may alienate those who know nothing about contemporary dance.

Dance Base - National Centre For Dance, 11 - 22 Aug (not 16), times vary, £5.00, fpp 151. [fm]

tw rating 3/5

### Danceforms' 53rd Intl. Choreographers' Showcase

Dance-Forms Productions

The showcase opens with a bewilderingly complex piece involving a large man, apparently dressed as a warlock, reciting inscrutable poetry, a woman in a white leotard writhing about with a satin sheet on the floor and a black and white film projected onto the back wall - in short, the sort of thing that gives interpretative dance a bad name. There were magical moments (not produced by the warlock), as in the leaning, keening movements of 'Ternion' and the distressing scrabbling on the floor in 'Asslema/Beslema', though it would have been a courtesy to the audience to have these unusual words explained in the programme. As it is, it remains abstract, arcane and inaccessible, with little appeal beyond the connoisseur.

Spoilites @ The Merchants' Hall, 9 - 14 Aug, 5.10pm (6.25pm), £7.00 - £10.00, fpp 146. [gg]

tw rating 2/5

### Flawless - Chase the Dream

Underbelly Productions/Flawless

Whenever Flawless performed an impressive dance move, the man beside me said "you can do that Ben" to his nine-year-old son. That man was a filthy, stinking liar, and 'Flawless' are preposterously impressive helmsmen of popular contemporary dance. Their repertoire varies (at breakneck speeds) from urban to balletic, comedic to erotic; from intimate solos to aggressive dance-offs to big, camp ensemble theatrics. Springing first to mind are a huge, cinematic street-scene and a genuinely moving triple mirror dance concerning depression: two dissimilar dances which illustrate the troupe's variety. In one scene someone did the robot so ingeniously that I thought "goodness, he almost looks like a person!" Flawless are gifted, athletic role models and ambassadors for the electrifying future of Breakdance.

Underbelly's Pasture, 5 - 30 Aug (not 16), 3.45pm (4.45pm), £12.50 - £13.50, fpp 147. [kb]

tw rating 5/5

## MUSICALS AND OPERA

### Reel-To-Real: The Movies Musical

Huairou Management and Broadway Asia International

On a rainy Edinburgh day sometimes you just need a bit of glitz and glamour, and this full-scale musical based on classic Hollywood films and Broadway numbers should do the trick. Against a frantic background of projections and film clips the cast strut and twirl their way around the world,

cleverly interacting with the visuals so that they merge into one another, while props magically appear from out of the screen. Yet while it is a treat for the eyes, the vocals themselves are disappointingly thin and each song is introduced with the subtlety of a sledgehammer. A hugely dynamic and professional show for the Fringe, but prepare to be schmaltzed to within an inch of your life.

Pleasance Courtyard, 4 - 30 Aug (not 10, 17, 24), 6.00pm (7.10pm), £12.50 - £15.00, fpp 216. [lj]

tw rating 3/5

## THEATRE

### The Head Girl, The Gap Year, and Sue-Ellen

Friends Re-ignited (Rachel McCluskey & Jo McFarlane)/PBH's Free Fringe

Talented duo Rachel McCluskey and Jo McFarlane confidently present an unusual slice of performance poetry. Exploring the changes over time in the relationship between rebellious Rachel and school Head Girl Jo, and their respective mindsets, it poignantly touches on a myriad of issues; infatuation, mental health and growing up and apart and the awakenings it brings. Highlights include the darkly comic 'Showtime on the Psychiatric Ward' and the offbeat whimsy of 'Life is a Bowl of Semolina Pudding'. The pace and intonation could be more varied however, and although thoughtful and delivered with some passion, it's not as moving as it could be. It won't blow you away, but it's a relaxing way to spend an hour.

The Banshee Labyrinth, 7 - 17 Aug, 8.40pm (9.40pm), free, fpp 258. [qjs]

tw rating 3/5

### Quadrille Moving Parts Theatre Group

'Quadrille' asks some difficult questions, but instead of treating topics such as religion, homosexuality, drugs and rape with intelligence and decorum, the play charges through them at lightning speed. The plot, in which four people trapped in a surreal city space try to piece together the night before, has an original and exciting premise, but as traumatic events are unravelled, the actors struggle to cope with dramatic demands. Each character has a moment in which it is suggested they'll finally develop into real people, but we are disappointed. The innovative set creates facets of the city economically, and the cinematic descriptions of Edinburgh and these inhabitants are at times beautiful, but the play takes on too much, and cannot deliver its exciting promise.

Diverse Attractions, 9 - 14 Aug, 7.00pm (8.00pm), £7.00 - £10.00, fpp 281. [cnm]

tw rating 2/5

### The Friendship Experiment

Big Wow in Association with Richard Jordan Productions Ltd.

A control-freak and a deluded fall-guy don't make the best improv-comedy duo, but Tim Lynskey and Matt Rutter's hyperactive stage personae are perfectly suited to this farce-within-a-farce about two struggling improvisers. Played at brain-haemorrhage intensity, the show may seem anarchic at first, but in fact is held together with a sharp script and impeccable comic timing. Whether it's Tim's riotous one-man bar-brawl, Matt's disastrous over-enthusiasm, or the pair's strangely touching married old couple style bickering, every drop of potential is wrung from the simple premise. And then they subvert it, taking apart the theatrical devices they've been exploiting for laughs, and getting even more in the process. A madcap mash of comedy and theatre.

Underbelly, 5 - 29 Aug (not 17), 3.05pm (4.15pm), £6.00 - £10.50, fpp 254. [df]

tw rating 4/5

## The Diary Of A Sentimental Serial Killer

Teatro Dei Borgia

Presented with an actor seated in a dim pool of light on an empty stage, one doesn't necessarily expect an hour of escapism, but that is what this one-man show gives. Performer Gianpiero Borgia's storytelling face, emphatic delivery and rhythmic voice are a window onto the world of a lovelorn professional assassin who jets between Paris, Istanbul and Mexico on the trail of his final victim. Although this style of dramatic narration may not be to everyone's taste, Borgia, combining passion with remoteness, does convince as a man who inhabits the mysterious world of covert international operations. Surrender your ears and your imagination to the tale and be rewarded with vivid, almost cinematic, descriptions of action and cityscape.

Pleasance Courtyard, 4 - 30 Aug, 2.00pm (3.00pm), £7.50 - £9.00, fpp 244. [dp]

tw rating 3/5

## Wednesday

By Ian Winterton

It's been ages since I saw a good thriller and I'm afraid this show did nothing to change that: there was too much screaming, door-banging, and too few cringe-worthy moments. Although 'Wednesday' is based on an interesting concept (a weird psychopath admiring a girl's former rapist kidnaps them both to re-enact said rape), the direction leaves very much to be desired. The characters feel like they have no depth, mostly because their back-stories aren't introduced properly, instead of subtly creating suspense, every revelation made me feel a drum-roll was in order. The pace is stable until the end, then everything interesting is crammed into the last ten minutes, which means that the violence isn't slow enough to be horrifying and believable.

The Vault, 9 - 30 Aug (not 16, 23), 9.35pm (10.30pm), £7.00 - £9.00, fpp 303. [ms]

tw rating 2/5

## Miranda

TARA and Farouk Dhondy

Follow a tantalising tale of boldly drawn and seductive characters as budding Bollywood actress Miranda is seduced by a mysterious acting troupe on the island of Goa. Ankur Bahl's superlative dance form anchors the show - his physicality is astonishingly precise. There's some incredible prop work as well: Bahl uses a single red rope as a dress, a motorcycle, and a beach. Farouk Dhondy's script is excellent, and takes an incisive and imaginative look at Shakespeare's 'The Tempest', using some exciting devices, while Danyal Dhondy and Swagata Biswas provide a driving score. Decolonialisation and gender are eloquently addressed, but the plot owes a lot of its power to Indian ghost legends. 'Miranda' is playful, intriguing, and beautifully performed - a wonderful re-imagining.

Assembly @ George Street, 6 - 29 Aug (not 23), £9.00 - £12.00, fpp 272. [fm]

tw rating 5/5

## You're Not Like The Other Girls, Chrissy

Caroline Horton

Christiane, a poor-sighted French girl in the 1930s, signs up for a very long engagement in this touching solo piece. Caroline Horton, a slight and sympathetic performer with wonderfully expressive eyes and hands, demonstrates some incredible comic timing, and her physicality is quietly detailed and rigorous. The script is also first-rate, and deconstructs English idioms to hilarious effect. The integration of scene-setting suitcases, although charming and well-conceived, suffers because of the long list of previous productions that have employed them more imaginatively. It all seems sweet and rather pointless - until the end. Horton's multimedia reframes her performance, transforming it from a well-written character piece into a

creation (or curation?) that will bring tears to your eyes.

Pleasance Courtyard, 4 - 30 Aug (not 18), 12.45pm (1.45pm), £6.50 - £9.00, fpp 307. [fm]

tw rating 4/5

## 10 Dates With Mad Mary

Calipo Theatre Company

Yasmine Akram's beautifully written one-woman show was performed by Caoilfhionn Dunne with all the humour and pathos the role required. In a stream of consciousness, the eponymous lead discusses her love life, taking in tragedy and comedy along the way. 'Ten Dates' will have you laughing one minute and crying the next thanks to its pop-culture references, sardonic wit and pure emotion. Dunne's performance is remarkable in this role that seems tailor-made for her talent, and the only flaw is the emotive music used throughout; it is hammy and also entirely unnecessary, as Dunne conveys all the emotion required. Writer and performer create a magical partnership in 'Ten Dates'. Go see perhaps the most compelling solo performance at this year's festival.

Pleasance Dome, 4 - 29 Aug (not 16, 23), 5.20pm (6.15pm), £9.00 - £11.00, fpp 294. [amb]

tw rating 5/5

## Swann And Company Present: The Sad, Miserable Tale Of Albert Belacqua And His Family Of Doomed Neurotics

Southampton University Student's Union Theatre Group

It's clear this play's not behaving itself when the performance begins in the lobby, as egomaniacal director Robert Swann (Sam Jenkins-Shaw) introduces his incompetent company. The farce that then unfolds shows these actors falling apart during a doomed melodrama. The performers (as opposed to their characters) take to it admirably, with fine slapstick, comic overacting and a nice line in antagonistic bickering. They're impressively inventive in sabotaging their own show, but the chaos is too disorganised to be sustainable. Once it runs out of steam you realise there's no particular plot, but merely a premise that might appeal to first year theatre studies students who smirk knowingly when someone mentions 'meta-fiction'. God knows there's enough of them at the Fringe.

C oquilla, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16 Aug, 1.00pm (2.10pm), £6.50 - £9.50, fpp 293. [df]

tw rating 3/5

## The Bacchae

ColArts Festival Theater

If writhing man-on-man action isn't your cup of tea, steer clear of this adaptation of Euripides' classical tragedy. In this all-male re-telling, Doug Spearman's powerful and prancing Dionysus tempts and destroys only-straight-in-the-village Pentheus, the story told through wildly physical performances, melodrama and neatly updated speeches, most notably Mike Tauzin's fine monologues. No 'radical reworking', this sticks close to the ancient text, emphasising rather than adding the repression-versus-curiosity dynamic driving the drama. It's weakened by dodgy David Bowie face paint, phallic punning, and a gay-rave sequence which only confuses the tone. Undeniably stylish, but less daring than it thinks, 'The Bacchae' leaves you unsure just how straight it's being played.

Venue 13, 7 - 21 Aug, times vary, £5.00 - £8.00, fpp 229. [df]

tw rating 3/5

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