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CABARET

The Lady Boys of Bangkok Fantasy and Feathers Tour

Lady Boys of Bangkok

Glitter, drag and gags perfectly sums up 'The Lady Boys of Bangkok'. As its title indicates, the beautiful showgirls in spectacular costumes parading round the stage are men; a concept that this production heavily relies upon in order for any choreographical mishaps to be overlooked. At least one mistake in every dance routine and more than a little shoddy mime-work cheapened what could have potentially been a fabulous cabaret show, but having said this, it cannot be denied that the Lady Boys are stunning and it is quite a feat to pull off a mammoth production such as this one. However, physical manoeuvres and a big budget alone cannot elevate the show's content from medium to high class.

Meadows Theatre Big Top, 6-27 Aug, times vary, £10.00-£22.00, fpp 265. [sh]

tw rating 3/5

COMEDY

Cellophane

Himnariki/Interprot

"Hello, I'm the actress", beams a paradigm of motherly virtue, sauntering onto the stage in a saucy red nightie. This one woman show dedicates itself to the ultimate altruist - the working mother. With one uniformed grin she can personify sunshine or conjure the smiley facade of a repressed maniac. 'Cellophane' is punchy in its humour and precise in its observations, appealing unanimously to men and women. Disappointingly, it only makes the briefest courtesy attempt at revealing the character's emotional vulnerability; this does not hamper the piece, but its hasty inclusion taints the comic performance, unnecessarily flagging up its triviality. However, whilst 'Cellophane' may not be hugely memorable in its observations, it is entirely enjoyable in its execution.

Pleasance Courtyard, 7-15 Aug, 12.40pm (1.40pm), £8.50 - £11.00, fpp 41. [np]

tw rating 3/5

The Clean As Possible Comedy Show

Just Fair Laughs

This was advertised as a show boasting some of the Fringe's top comedians: I would say that claim was hard-pushed tonight. That's not to say it wasn't enjoyable; the compère was excellent and overall the show was reasonably clean and ran smoothly but the first act made too many race jokes (just because you can tell them doesn't mean you have to). The second act was better, showcasing some incredible piano skills that were truly the saving grace of the night. The headline comedian performed a nice traditional set with stories about his child and the mysterious lack of his own belly button. This show has great potential, but tonight it was average; the line up changes though, so other nights may prove to be



SNAP OF THE DAY: Come on everybody, give us your "we're past half way" pose. The guys from 'Circus Trick Tease' at the Udderbelly Pasture. Photo: David Haggerton

more impressive.

The Lot, 6-30 Aug, 5.00pm (6.30pm), £4.00 - £5.00, fpp 45. [ajb]

tw rating 3/5

Kevin Bridges

Off the Kerb Productions

There's no doubt that Kevin Bridges is well-loved, particularly by a Scottish audience. This isn't without reason: Bridges is self-deprecating, easy to relate to, and swears throughout his set like a true Glaswegian. However, his stories occasionally lack a punch-line, becoming slightly rambling and not always following on logically from one another, whilst his attempts to talk to the audience - normally easy ground for a stand-up comedian - seem to misfire. He produces plenty of chuckles, as a comedian should, and his material is original and seems to come from genuine experience. The show's definitely worth a watch, if only to see what all the fuss is about, but let's hope Bridges has yet to reach his peak.

Assembly @ George Street, 9-30 Aug (not 16), 8.55pm (9.55pm), £13.00 - £16.00, fpp 84. [lw]

tw rating 3/5

A Betrayal Of Penguins: Don't Run With Scissors

Betrayal Of Penguins

What a brilliant concept for a comedy show! The performers play the parts of children's TV presenters and you get to be their live studio audience (yes, welcome back to childhood, the best time of your life

is here again). After a warm welcome, you are encouraged to make paper aeroplanes from a sheet on your chair; what follows is the ridiculous yet humorous saga of watching presenters Matt and Ross, along with Oliver the Penguin, try to save their failing programme. Although some parts are more successful than others, the show is hilarious and as energetic as if the performers had eaten a load of multi-coloured E numbers disguised as sweets. The unscripted moments were glorious and these comedians have obvious talent. So remember kids, 'don't run with scissors', but do run to see this show.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, 4-30 Aug (not 17), 2.45pm (3.45pm), £7.00 - £10.00, fpp 35. [cc]

tw rating 4/5

Miles Jupp: Fibber In The Heat (A Cricket Tale)

Miles Jupp

Looking for some inspiration? A moment of reflection? Or simply a hilarious tale of one man's optimistic pursuit of his dreams? There is one show this Fringe that provides all of the above, and a great deal more. Miles Jupp's set is based on an excellent story packed full of personal anecdotes and witty one-liners. Delivered with superb timing and very well structured, the show was an instant hit. The whole act was very emotive and the audience really engaged with Jupp's plight. He has an unbelievable ability to command the attention of an entire room solely with his words; I encourage you to experience it for yourself.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, 4-29 Aug (not 16), 8.00pm (9.00pm), £5.00 - £10.00, fpp 98. [ajb]

tw rating 4/5

Beacon Of Health And Fitness: Racy Comedy With An Open Chakra

Abigoliah Schamaun/Laughing Horse Free Festival With oozing desperation, the implausibly named Abigoliah Schamaun takes us through the basic staple of every stand up's set; the trials and tribulations of their own life (well the exaggerated version anyway). Schamaun's is that of a frumpy, self-deprecating, yet overtly sexual yoga instructor desperate to be famous. She regales the audience with amusingly bitter anecdotes about her failed attempts to lead the healthy life, and her (oddly familiar) sexual revelations. These stories leave the women in the crowd sagely nodding in appreciation, and the men in the hope that there are more woman like Abigoliah in the world. In a sharp routine delivered with much aplomb, this flexible Ohio girl succeeds in being both racy and hilarious.

The Counting House, 6-30 Aug (not 18), 10.15pm (11.15pm), free, fpp 32. [ta]

tw rating 3/5

No Son Of Mine

Rufus Jones and Alex Kirk - Festival Highlights

It's the classic father-son tearjerker: boy leaves northern home to become an actor, boy puts on ghastly play, father turns up, elbows his way on stage and

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cont>> systematically humiliates and disheartens boy revealing in the process the dysfunctions and retardations of their tempestuous relationship - you know the sort of thing. Jones and Kirk are stunning, stage-filling actors; their characters are brilliant and this show is exhaustingly funny from start to finish. Boasting impeccable, intelligent timing and structure, riddled with erratic whimsy (I specially commend a scene in which the boy and his father sensually re-enact his parents' courtship - with the boy playing his own mother), this show deserves every laughter-weakened seat in the Baby Grand, and more besides.

Pleasance Courtyard, 4 - 30 Aug (not 11, 25), 3.15pm (4.15pm), £8.50 - £10.00, fpp 105. [kb]

tw rating 4/5

Emo Philips: Please Witness My Act

Off the Kerb Productions

When talking of his prolonged absence from Edinburgh on account of critics (a good time to pocket press passes, I found), Philips reminisces over previous negative criticisms. As I have nothing but praise for him, I do hope no such hiatus will ever occur again. From start to finish his act is an absurdist wet-dream of epic proportions. Everything about him has a quirky allure: the wavering and dulcet tone befitting a lost child in a supermarket, the clownish clothing, all tied up in a wonderful whirlwind of weirdness. Such an endearing presence is then compounded by uproarious postulations and images that would bet the mind of a sexual deviant high on sherbet. I have proudly been converted to Emo.

Pleasance Courtyard, 5 - 29 Aug (not 9, 16), 8.00pm (9.00pm), £12.50 - £16.00, fpp 59. [np]

tw rating 4/5

Danny Ward + 1

Danny Ward

If there is better stand up elsewhere for free then I want to know about it, because it really would have to be world class to top this show. Danny Ward's observational humour is brilliantly delivered - it's a testament to his talent that he even managed to draw huge laughs reading the ingredients from the back of a tomato ketchup sachet (must be seen to be believed). If it was Ward's solo slot that I was reviewing - his guest comedian of the day was Luke McQueen from 'Fancy A Threesome', but this will, of course, change - I would've been tempted to up the rating to 5/5, as this is top quality stand up that should have filled the venue twice over. I implore you to go and see it!

Sin Club And Lounge, 7 - 28 Aug, 3.00pm (3.50pm), free, fpp 52. [tv]

tw rating 4/5

Colin Hoult: Enemy Of The World

Mick Perrin For Just For Laughs Live

I just didn't want this show to end because 'Colin Hoult's bizarre collection of characters was so fluidly pulled off, seamlessly produced, and intensely original. From the delightfully regional squaddie-come-scriptwriter, to the delicious diva (never overplayed), Hoult's set had me in absolute screaming stitches. You might be reminded of the 'League of Gentlemen', but this is so much more than that. His originality is so powerful that it's almost astounding, and his slick wit is just divine. This show is categorically superb.

Pleasance Courtyard, 7 - 29 Aug, 4.45pm (5.45pm) £7.00 - £9.50, fpp 46. [mb]

tw rating 5/5

Sadie Hasler: Lady Bones

Avalon Promotions Ltd

In a quick waltz through some famous women of history, Sadie Hasler makes some interesting choices; alongside old favourites Emmeline Pankhurst, Sylvia Plath and

Germaine Greer snuggle Charlotte Bronte and Fanny Craddock, both as you've never seen them before. Hasler has a gift for defining characters and the changes between them are immediate and complete, while some of the situations they are cast in are hilariously bizarre (Bronte separated from her conjoined twin, Marie Curie teaching sex ed with the help of a worm). While as an actor Hasler is flawless, sometimes the material is stretched a little too thin - we can only revisit Iris Murdoch's Alzheimer's so many times before the comedy wanes - but this is a polished performance.

Pleasance Courtyard, 4 - 30 August, 3.30pm (4.30pm), £7.00 - £9.50, fpp 118. [tc]

tw rating 3/5

Morning Wordship

John Hegley

There are many ways to get going in the morning: coffee, the daily news. Before today I had never considered poetry to be one of them, and 'Morning Wordship' is perhaps the one show that could change my mind. John Hegley's voice is truly suited to his art and his style is uncontested, and although some parts of the show felt like sitting in a Sunday school class, (arguably the point), the majority of the proceedings proved enjoyable. The drawings Hegley used added humour and a visual element to the act, whilst the music added spirit. Altogether I doubt this is the best way to wake up - I felt too relaxed - but with the right crowd, this sing-along might be the ticket.

Pleasance Courtyard, 12 - 29 Aug, 11.30am (12.35pm), £10.00 - £12.00, fpp 100. [qjb]

tw rating 3/5

The Lyin' Bitch and The Wardrobe

Mike Keat

After a ten year absence, Mike Keat (the creative influence behind the Cuban Brothers) has returned to the city of Edinburgh, to take you on a journey through his time growing up here. This mixture of music, stand-up, sketches and dance, sees some brilliant sketches with characters such as 'Tantric Dougy' the burger van hippie and 'Zen Bastarn' the street fighting master. 'Cuban Brother: How to Dance' videos interlink the sketches and their brand of extreme silliness is very amusing. The show may not be a laugh a minute but Keat, with the help of Cuban brother 'numero dos', Archie Easton, keeps the audience fully entertained, and you will certainly leave with a smile on your face.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, 5 - 30 Aug (not 22), 7.15pm (8.15pm), £9.00 - £11.50, fpp 98. [sr]

tw rating 4/5

DANCE AND PHYSICAL THEATRE

Potato Country

Gunilla Heilborn

What do you think about China? What makes you happy? What do you think of women's rights? These are three questions that you will be asked by the dancers of 'Potato Country', so bear them in mind. They probably define you as a person, or at least Gunilla Heilborn would have you think so, as the cast eye you directly, dancing, marching and firing off questions. Their disjointed dance piece aims to explore what makes happiness, perhaps by looking at the Swedish love of melancholy (as they phrase it). They do this by presenting a bunch of hopeless-looking people whose awkwardness at dancing is probably intentional. But ultimately, there's too much of that and not enough of the happiness.

Dance Base - National Centre for Dance, 13 - 20 Aug, times vary, £5.00, fpp 152. [rtw]

tw rating 2/5

Where Did It All Go Right?

ponydance

Outstanding performers - check: banging soundtrack - check: innovation and quirk factor - check. Set and performed in a seedy back room bar at GHQ nightclub, this exhilarating dance of social comment from Irish company ponydance imagines the events of a typical night with acute observational comedy that has the audience roaring with laughter and cringing with self-awareness. Four audacious yet deeply humble dancers bare themselves in a laugh-a-minute physical riot, delivering surprises at every turn. This devised work is absolutely cutting edge and the agile performers, physically engaged to the hilt, have a knack for comedy timing rarely seen in dance. A must see for dance lovers, a must-must see for dance haters, and probably the best five you'll spend this Fringe.

Dance Base @ GHQ, 11 - 22 Aug (not 16), £5.00, fpp 155. [hm]

tw rating 4/5

2010: A Space Oddity

Company Gavin Robertson

No surprise: just another remake, that's all. Inspired by a movie masterpiece to create a theatrical parody, the company could potentially reach a wide audience, but the staging of this show lacks originality and is able only to capture the attention of space movie connoisseurs. Even if the lightness of the show entertains and the funny use of the objects raises a laugh, in general the level of the production is amateur, including the performances of the two actors whose idiosyncratic habits may have been amusing, but overall felt contrived. In 2010, at the Fringe, we would expect to see some real oddity, and this isn't it.

The Zoo, 6 - 30 Aug (even days, plus 11), 12.30pm (1.40pm), £9.00 - £11.00, fpp 154. [ga]

tw rating 2/5

EVENTS

Wine School at the Fringe

Case Studies Wine School

"You should be getting tones of chocolate overlaid with oak." I sniff my glass dubiously, sure I will never make a wine connoisseur. But our guide is patient and insists anyone can build up a mental catalogue of aromas over time. Sitting in the barge feels calm and intimate, and learning goes down easily along with the range of complex and tantalising wines selected for us. At the ticket price, this is probably only worthwhile for beginners who really want learn about the expensive stuff. But if you've always wanted to understand how a drink from a grape can taste like a tree, and broaden your horizons, you will certainly not be wasting your time, tasting their wine.

The Millennium Link, 6 - 30 Aug (not 9, 10, 16, 17, 23, 24), times vary, £19.00, fpp 165. [mg]

tw rating 3/5

MUSIC

The Ukulele Project

Le Nez Productions Ltd

A smaller (and sexier) version of The Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain, The Ukulele Project are bound to fulfil all your ukulele needs. Taking on a variety of tracks ranging from Radiohead classics through to James Bond medleys and Johnny Flynn covers, the four members of the group are engaging performers, and their set is endearingly simple. However, whilst their lead singer has a lovely voice and carries the tunes well, he occasionally struggles to reach the top notes, letting down otherwise great renditions of a wide variety of songs. It's a good act, though, and well worth seeing. Sweet and upbeat, The

Ukulele Project proves a very mellow way to begin the afternoon.

Underbelly, 5 - 29 Aug (not 16), 12.45pm (1.45pm), £6.50 - £11.00, fpp 205. [lw]

tw rating 3/5

THEATRE

Hacker and Muldoon

'Hacker and Muldoon' is like a condensed 'Withnail and I', though not quite as funny. A selfish, bad-tempered and outrageously verbose writer and his likeable, reasonable co-writer struggle to meet the publishing deadline upon which their dwindling income depends. It all takes place in one room and the actors, although passionate, do not inject quite enough energy into the static performance to keep it engaging. The script explores the bad clichés that the pair have to deal with, but it is often hard to distinguish between the parody of bad writing, and bad writing itself. Nevertheless there are a few funny moments, and with a tighter performance this play might work well.

The Vault, 9 - 22 Aug (not 16), 8.15pm (9.05pm), £5.00 - £7.00, fpp 257. [mg]

tw rating 2/5

Smiler

Richard Fry

I cannot begin to convey the emotional power of 'Smiler'. My surroundings dissolve as Fry begins to relate, in captivating versed dialogue, the story of a handicapped friend. Paedophilia, prejudice and assisted suicide set the tone of the piece as a raw, uncensored reliving rather than self-indulgent sob story. Yet Fry's harrowing tale isn't without humour: metre and rhyme are occasionally ruptured by a razor sharp wit. Laughs are short-lived, however, and mere examples of the inescapable hilarity associated with disability. Like all exceptional art, you leave 'Smiler' shedding a tear, not just for the story you've heard, but for its greater exploration of humanity at large. That's why you must see it, regardless of whether it ruins your lunchtime.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, 4 - 30, 12.15pm (1.15pm), £5.00 - £10.00, fpp 289. [ah]

tw rating 5/5

Underneath the Lintel by Glen Berger

Landmark Productions (Ireland)

A library book returned more than a hundred years late is the basis for this wonderfully compelling story of a staid, pompous librarian whose jobworth tendencies catapult him into an ancient mystery. Philip O'Sullivan gives a beautifully subtle and powerful performance as the petty Dutch bureaucrat whose life is turned on its head as he embarks on a quest to seek out the mythical wandering Jew. It's extremely well written, weaving together snippets of history, theology, mythology and geography in a way that never seems overwhelming, dull or didactic. The premise and unassuming opening may not immediately suggest an emotional roller coaster, but against all the odds that's what you get from this gem of a show.

Assembly@Assembly Hall, 5 - 29 August (not 9, 16 or 23), 2.15pm (3.30pm), £11.00 - £14.00, fpp 301. [jm]

tw rating 5/5

Under the Blacklight

Cicero Productions

This delightful half hour snippet is perfect for the short attention span of the Fringe viewer. The two-tiered cast made up for what they lacked in numbers with bold and incredibly well executed performances. They played protagonists Anne and Jennifer, who are left to mourn their dashed dancing dreams whilst slowly nearing lunacy in the blacklight of the props department. These two diverse characters juxtaposed the comedic with the sinister, jumping from sentimentality to

ridiculous cake-posting stunts. Although I could have watched this for several more hours, I must admit that the play was a compact parcel of entertainment which it might have been damaging to extend. If you do have a spare 30 minutes, you really couldn't spend the time more profitably.

Zoo Roxy, 6 - 30 Aug, 7.45pm (8.15pm), £5.00 - £7.50, fpp 301. [eg]

tw rating 4/5

Why Men Cheat

No. No. Just - no. 'Why Men Cheat' is a two-man play, 'based on interviews with 250 men!' which purports to tell the outré truth about male-female relationships, which is: all men want to cheat. All women are controlling shrews. And if you don't give a woman an orgasm during sex, you've failed, as a man. It's amazing. Not the play - no, the play's superficial, condescending, deeply unfunny tosh. What's amazing is that writer/interviewer Peader de Burca managed to find 250 men to corroborate his jaded, deluded take on love. Mind you, if you deliberately set out to interview male adulterers it's not so surprising the resulting play has such a skewed, hateful attitude to love and women. Just - no.

Assembly @ George Street, 5 - 30 Aug (not 16, 23), 5.15pm (6.20pm), £12 - £14, fpp 305. [kc]

tw rating 1/5

Women Laughing

Big Girls Don't Eat Soap

At first, the raucous and somewhat forced nature of these women's laughter indicated that they were a bit sick of performing repetitive outbursts of frivolity. This unconvincing noise met me as I stepped apprehensively into the auditorium. However, the excellently calculated timing of the awkward opening exchange between the male protagonists soon wiped away my discomfort. If you like the mannered domestic plays of the 1960s with their revelations, trivial preoccupations and caricatured personalities, you'll love this. Michael Hall's gentle comedy was delightfully presented, and John McCormick portrayed the brooding Colin absolutely rivetingly. They left me hungry for the absent second act, which I was unfortunately left to read for myself. Such are the sad limitations of the Fringe Festival.

theSpaces on the mile @ The Radisson, 6 - 28 Aug (not 8, 15, 22), 12.40pm (2.00pm), £5.00-£7.00, fpp 306. [eg]

tw rating 4/5

I Can't Stand Up For Falling Down - Free

Jim Higo/Best Medicine Productions/Laughing Horse Free Festival

We all want to be masters of our own destiny, but as comedian Billy Bly realises in this one-man show, sometimes that means making some difficult decisions. Jim Higo is instantly likeable and performs with real charisma and warmth as he tells Billy's story about making life-changing discoveries. The monologue is at times quite touching, especially when it explores those things that we can all relate to - family, illness and expectations of the self. Yet alongside this there runs a constant strand of Billy's humour, incredibly heavy on the use of similes, its crassness occasionally jarring with the poignancy of the rest of the story. Ultimately, despite the moments of tenderness, there are better soul-searching shows at the Fringe.

Laughing Horse @ The Argyle, 6 - 29 Aug (not 16, 23), 1.15pm (2.15pm), free, fpp 260. [jj]

tw rating 2/5

THREEWEEKS IN EDINBURGH

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