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COMEDY

It's Not Father Stone - It's... Michael Redmond!

Gilded Balloon

A stand-up show that revolves around audience interaction relies heavily on the audience itself to find the funny: here lies the problem with Michael Redmond. You might recognise Redmond as Father Stone from 'Father Ted' (hence the title) and if this is the case you may be more inclined to laugh at his stand-up. For this non-follower, however, his soft Irish tones had a sleep-inducing quality. The majority of the set revolves around the irrelevant part of a joke, and requires huge improvisational skill from the comedian, who, at one point, spends far too much time asking the audience to vote on the colour of his hair. Unfortunately, the endearing Redmond suffers the curse of the awkward pause.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, 4 - 30 Aug (not 16), 5.00pm (6.00pm), £8.00 - £10.00, fpp 74. [ge]

tw rating 2/5

Chris Cross Is Escaping From Reality

Chris Cross / PBH's Free Fringe

Chris Cross is like Russell Brand on steroids, and I know what you're thinking: Brand already is. The show had no structure, and the act was lost amongst crazy ramblings and endless repetition, and though I am a big fan of relaxed, colloquial performances, it's just not interesting when the performer is too out of it to... perform. The majority of audience banter he got away with, but some of the more taboo jokes were not well received. The crux of the show lay in contortionism and escapology, an element of the show which was oddly entertaining, and with that material Cross managed to generate a good buzz from the crowd. When he is in the zone, the performance is faultless. When he isn't, it all falls apart.

The Voodoo Rooms, 12 - 27 Aug, 9.35pm (10.35pm), free, fpp 44. [ajb]

tw rating 2/5

Felix Dexter - Multiple Personalities In Order

Bound & Gagged Comedy

Felix's personalities are certainly 'in order,' as his different personas can only be described as unremarkable: we are introduced to the British 'toff' and the street-wise 'rude boy' whose jokes only seem to revolve around class and racial discrimination. Unfortunately, these caricatures - that were possibly considered risqué a few years ago - are also interspersed with audience interaction, a technique used so often that it appears more like laziness, as opposed to friendliness, on the part of the comedian. Felix Dexter is certainly a likeable and charming comic, but this fails to make up for his lack of edgy material. This is a show that goes down like a lukewarm beer: familiar, unsatisfying and flat.

Pleasance Courtyard, 4 - 29 Aug, 9.00pm (10.00pm), £11.50 - £14.00, fpp 61. [gm]

tw rating 2/5

Jason Chong - Minority Retort

Jason Chong

Sometimes traditional formulas work the best. After all, there is a reason they are traditional. Jason Chong's set was nothing extraordinary; it was just plain funny. He began by explaining his national identity - Australasian - and what his heritage meant to him. Race jokes ran close to the line, but the skilful wording kept Chong on the audience's good side. He told tales of his parents, his girlfriend and moved onto random bits about ethnicity and the film 'Transformers', where some clever props and a guitar were used. By merging anecdotes of humorous circumstances and jovial reflection, Chong has crafted a near-perfect piece.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, 4 - 30 Aug, 11.30pm (12.20am), £5.00 - £10.00, fpp 99. [ajb]

tw rating 4/5

Strong and Wrong Hopeless Productions

'Not boring' is about as complimentary as I can get about this show, which is an hour of very short, highly enthused sketches with the occasional song thrown in for good measure. The two comedians are chirpy and amicable - and I'm sure they're terrific people off stage - but these attributes are outweighed by a dearth of subtlety, innovation and timing. A recurring sketch about an interpretive soliloquist mouthing off in inappropriate situations went down well, but nothing else of much merit springs to mind, and the bulk of the hour was built up of thin and ill-delivered ephemera. Dan Carter-Hope is clearly a talented musician and Anna-Maria Nabirye has a kind of brisk gusto: serviceable abilities that are perhaps better directed elsewhere.

Just The Tonic at the Caves, 5 - 29 Aug (not 17), 2.15pm (3.15pm), £7.00 - £9.00, fpp 127. [kb]

tw rating 2/5

Mervyn Stutter's Pick Of The Fringe

Mervyn Stutter

I want to thank Mervyn Stutter for saving my precious time, as every day he presents six of the best acts from the Fringe, ranging from speciality acts and stand-ups to musicals and sketch shows. My personal pick of the bunch was Chris McCausland whose stand up material is truly brilliant observational humour. He has a natural gift and is one of the funniest stand ups that I have seen in recent years. Stutter was a brilliant compere, who capably eased each act into the next. All in all it was a thoroughly enjoyable afternoon and I would gladly go again. A bargain for a lovely tray of hors d'oeuvres, leaving me better informed about what to get for my main course.

Pleasance Courtyard, 7 - 29 Aug (not 10, 18, 19, 24), 12.55pm (2.25pm), £7.50 - £10.00, fpp 96. [tv]

tw rating 4/5

Sex, Lies and the KKK Abie Philbin Bowman

Some comedians pepper their sets with morsels of their political beliefs; in Abie Philbin Bowman's case it's the political beliefs that are the set. Always keen to remind us that he is a forward-thinking



SNAP OF THE DAY: Hey, it's only Fringe favourite Stephen K Amos at The Pleasance. Photo: Kate Edwards

liberal (he calls himself a 'comedian without borders') he delivers what is an unashamed and successful hour of activist debate that lampoons and lambasts, with admirable quantities of temperance and understanding of evils such as sexism, racism and monogamy. He's funny here and there, mostly because what he's saying is sharp and true; the monogamy-argument in particular, rooted in Darwin and Emma Goldman, is well argued and astute. He's good at self-satire as well, notably in a pseudo-liberal debate about the rights of homophobics to marry. Not side-splitting, but intelligent and amusing nonetheless.

Just The Tonic at the Caves, 5 - 29 Aug (not 7, 17), 1.00pm, £7.50 - £9.50, fpp 121. [kb]

tw rating 3/5

EXHIBITIONS

Impressionist Gardens

National Galleries of Scotland

Having decked the gallery with massive daisies, it's clear curators Michael Clarke and

Claire Willsdon are going wild with this potted biography of the Impressionist movement. Not confined to the central work of Manet, Monet and Renoir, the exhibition tracks the style's development from the informal studies of Delacroix to the Pointillism of Henri Martin and the raw brushstrokes of Van Gogh, whose painting of the overgrown garden of his sanatorium is jaggedly emotive. The collection shows an obsession with nature and a fascination with dappled light; additional notes by Dr David Mitchell of the Botanic Gardens highlight tiny details hidden in the artists' work. Pick a rainy day and take a walk around these vibrant painted gardens.

National Gallery Complex, 2 Aug - 5 Sep, 10.00am (6.00pm), £7.00 - £10.00, fpp 169. [df]

tw rating 4/5

Phoebe Anna Traquair Song School Murals

St. Mary's Cathedral

Completed in 1892, Traquair's Song School houses a number of murals commissioned to educate and inspire the assembled choristers. The unpaid assignment was a

cont>>

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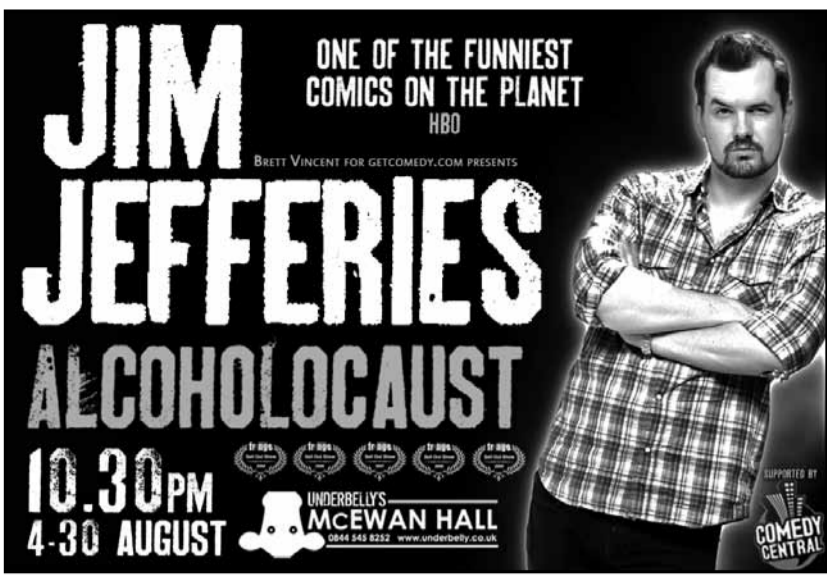
SWING!

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'Blistering musical satire' *The List*

★★★★★ *Scotsgay*
★★★★ *Broadway Baby*

Gilded Balloon 4pm daily



cont>> labour of love for Traquair and allowed her to explore a fusion of 19th century styles. Though the overall effect is Pre-Raphaelite, she draws on Blake, Botticelli and the forms and patterns of the arts and crafts movement to create something unique and personal. The school's walls are also a monument to her influences with many key figures of the era making an appearance alongside representations of the divine. The result is a curious window into the 19th Century, as well as an interesting example of Scottish Pre-Raphaelite art.

St. Mary's Cathedral, 2 - 31 Aug, times vary, free, fpp 169. [cmc]

tw rating 3/5

DANCE AND PHYSICAL THEATRE

{Extinguish} Ezra LeBank/ Lynx Co.

Love, loss, politics, philosophy, '{Extinguish}' glances over almost every subject in equal depth. However, its failure to commit to any topic results in a rambling, disconnected mix of poetry and prose tenuously linked by the theme of death's approach. The show is embellished with a little modest movement, but Ezra LeBank's writing is so aimless that he gives himself little to work with as a performer. The result is inoffensive, but also inconsequential, and offers at best a vague sprinkling of eastern wisdom. Special mention must go to the polysyllabic excess of the poetry with its ceaseless streams of synonyms; every second word is as irritating and unnecessary as the brackets around the show's title.

theSpace on theMile @ Jury's Inn, 6 - 28 Aug, 4.00pm (5.00pm), £7.00, fpp 146. [cmc]

tw rating 2/5

The Sum of it All... Anomic Multimedia Theatre

In that sleep of death, what dreams may come? This technology-heavy, beautifully poetic story of a reclusive, depressive man crossed in love becomes one such dream. Stuck in the perpetual torment of the afterlife, day after day Stanley is left to retrace the memories that led up to his suicide. An incredibly clever use of projections and animations brought the piece on to a new theatrical plane, the action reading like a dynamic, melancholic cartoon. But the use of multimedia was so ambitious that the actors could rarely keep up with it; inventive combinations of live and recorded action became comically out of time. If performed in a familiar space, the piece would have undoubtedly been more of a success.

Zoo Roxy, 6 - 30 Aug (not 14), 8.35pm (9.40pm), £5.00 - £10.00, fpp 154. [eg]

tw rating 3/5

MUSICALS AND OPERA

An Audience With Madame Schumann

Heink Anna Hillis/ PBH's Free Fringe

Three Husbands, seven children and a career that stretched from opera performances in New York to baby food advertising, there is no denying that Ernestine Schumann Heink lived a fascinating life. Anna Hillis' homage to this interesting personage is captivating and amusing, as she jumps from comic storytelling to operatic extracts, reflecting that Heink's life story has been meticulously researched. The result is a passionate and exciting performance, the highlight of which is undoubtedly Hillis' notable vocal talent; she demonstrates an impressive range and beautiful intonation. The character does slip

occasionally and the comedy sometimes simply titillates, rather than entertains, but this is nevertheless a gutsy performance and a fun, unique show.

Fingers Piano Bar, 7 - 28 Aug, 6.40pm (7.30pm), free, fpp 208. [lvs]

tw rating 3/5

David Faulds: 'Mario Lanza'

Cast Theatre Company

The short life of Mario Lanza, arguably the world's most popular crossover artist, forms the basis for David Faulds' one-man show. Even if you're not familiar with MGM's 'singing Clark Gable,' his rags-to-riches story is an interesting one and his rise and fall are recounted thoroughly and clearly, interspersed with a hit parade of classical, traditional Italian and Hollywood songs. Faulds captures moments of Lanza's swagger, but also goes a lot further in depicting this larger than life figure's struggle to control his ego and appetite. He lacks Lanza's overflowing charisma and full throttle, 'can belto' high notes. Underpowered singing and lack of comfort in the upper register are unfortunate drawbacks in an otherwise enjoyable show.

Sweet Grassmarket, 16 - 30 Aug, 2.30pm (3.20pm), £8.00 - £10.00, fpp 210. [jm]

tw rating 3/5

Fame - the Musical!

Hartshorn - Hook Productions

If the exclamation mark hasn't already stirred your enthusiasm for the recreation of this classic, let me have another try. David De Silva's rather overdone musical, containing desperate adolescent drama, smiling acrobatic dance and legendary show-tunes, seemed to glimmer with a new light in the hands of this talented group. The interwoven story lines of aspiring performers were universally well-executed, skilfully balancing the comedic and deeply tragic elements of the play. The choreography was truly electrifying and certain vocals, particular Serena's "Let's Play a Love Scene", were so stunningly powerful that they made me shiver. Hartshorn - Hook Productions' claim that this show is "raising the standard for musicals at the Fringe" is certainly one I would support. An awe inspiring, must-see performance.

C plaza, 5 - 26 Aug, 5.30pm (6.40pm), £6.50 - £11.50, fpp 210. [eg]

tw rating 5/5

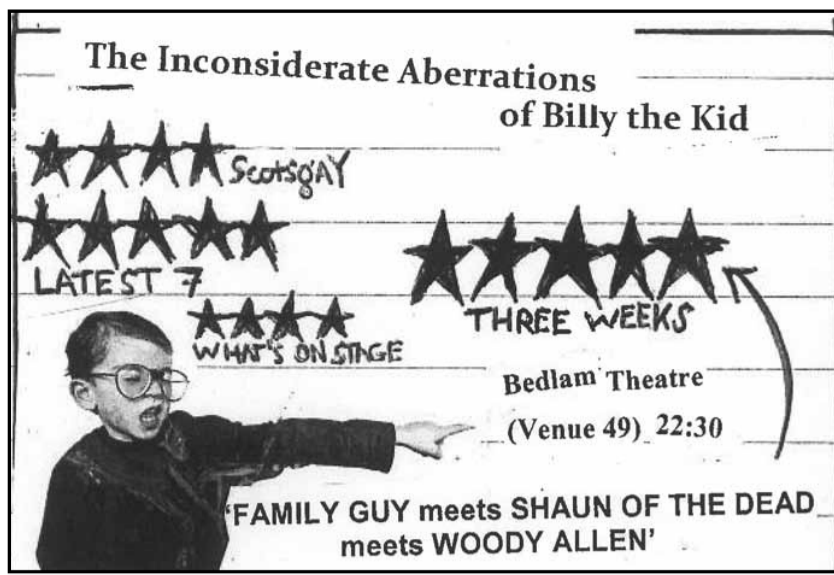
THEATRE

Hitler Alone Paul Webster

The faint rumble of the Edinburgh Tattoo's closing fireworks sounds like distant artillery in the claustrophobic room where Hitler paces and rants. This is Paul Webster's gripping study of a monster unravelling, but it's much more than a biography. Resisting simple caricature, the writer-performer makes a real attempt to understand the subject in all his daunting complexity. Lines from Shakespeare echo throughout, evoking the doomed villains of his tragedies, and though the script struggles under the weight of historical facts, it remains compelling thanks to Webster's convincing characterisation, which mixes charm and flashing intelligence with the familiar, psychotic persona. Though Webster's compelling and provocative play never excuses, it successfully humanises Hitler, which somehow makes it all the more chilling.

Inlingua Edinburgh, 12 - 26 Aug, 9.30pm (10.45pm), £6.00, fpp 258. [df]

tw rating 4/5



The Degenerates

Ribcaged Productions

It's always a pleasure to encounter a piece of new writing which manages to both entertain and stimulate the audience to reflect on social issues. Addressing the theme of homosexuality in terms of guilt and redemption, crime and rehabilitation, Jonathan Shipman's script creates a dark and disturbing reality, in which absurdities are inspired by actual crimes committed against homosexuals during the holocaust. Creating a purely theatrical setting, an intriguing plot, and two well constructed characters, the author succeeds in conveying his message provocatively (without being pretentious), offering the audience a universally necessary and compelling play. The direction is perfectly in line with the author's aim, and the actors' performances, which add a slight touch of comedy, are certainly effective.

C, 15 - 30 Aug, 1.10 pm (2.05 pm), £6.50 - £9.50, fpp 243. [ga]

tw rating 4/5

The Enlightenment: Morning Of The Modern World

Fencible Productions

In this extremely atmospheric lecture hall, adorned with sugar bowls, candles, and a mandolin, we witness an artistic retrospective of eighteenth-century Scotland. With comparisons to the enlightenment periods of Athens and Florence, David Purdie and Cameron Goodall give a summarised history of Edinburgh, and Scottish intellectual developments in society, arts, and sciences. Although interspersed with traditional folk ballads, and illustrated with hitherto unpublicised images and lithographs from the national archives, the listing may be misplaced in the 'Theatre' section of the guide. However, it remains accessible to all levels of familiarity with its focus on anecdotal references and its condensing structure. A wonderful chance for revellers to learn more about Edinburgh without the aid of the 'Horrible History' bus.

Henderson's Vegetarian Restaurant and Arts Venue, 16 - 27 Aug (not 21, 22), 10.30pm (11.30pm), £8.00 - £10.00, fpp 248. [np]

tw rating 4/5

Dr Faustus

Offshoots (in Association With Lancaster University Theatre Group)

Would you sell your soul to the devil? Ringmaster Mephistopheles was ready to grant us this wish as we entered the bustling circus in the transformed 'Iron Belly'. Marlowe's classic took on an eerie twist in the hands of contortionists, clowns and fortune tellers, all sinisterly devilish under blue and red lights. This, combined with burlesque movement sequences and the coincidental mustiness of the auditorium, effectively transported us into Faustus' nightmare. However, it was hard to ignore the dilapidated quality of the set, and a device involving restraining red ribbons comically recalled Rachel Stevens' 'Sweet Dreams My LA Ex'. Nonetheless, the circus premise was incredibly effective and I was thoroughly drawn into this re-imagining of the Elizabethan masterpiece.

Underbelly, Cowgate, 16 - 29 Aug, 11.30am (12.30pm), £6.50-£10.00, fpp 245. [eg]

tw rating 3/5

Figs In Wigs

Devised by Queen Mary Theatre Company

Ah, the world of dating... Governed by its own rules, dating is dreaded by some people the world over. This topic is the inspiration for 'Figs In Wigs,' an improvised piece of drama. Parts of the play are somewhat obscure and verge on some sort of attempt at performance art, such as the dance routines and the extended metaphor about the 'dating pool,' and there's also that ongoing joke about the cake (which I thought was hilarious). Despite the bits you don't quite get, the satirical undertones of this piece are very to the point (you might even recognise yourself in some of this), the acting is good and the ensemble appears to work very well together.

theSpace @ Venue 45, 16, 18, 20, 23, 25, 27 Aug, 7.05pm (7.50pm), £3.00 - £4.00, fpp 250. [ms]

tw rating 3/5

The Hub

Big Can Productions

This offbeat and quirky comedy, which follows a group of continuity announcers at a television studio, has some genuinely comic moments, but is hampered by one-

dimensional characters and a hammy script. Faith, newly returned after following her dream to work in Los Angeles, is back doing the job she left, alongside people who hate their work and an ex-boyfriend who resents her existence. What's interesting is that 'The Hub' boasts a terrific cast (including a great turn by comedian Matt Green), who sail through the comic elements, but struggle during with overly melodramatic romance at the centre of the story. Good in parts, but not nearly as funny as it needs to be.

Pleasance Courtyard, 4 - 30 Aug (not 17), 2.00pm (3.00pm), £7.00 - £9.50, fpp 260. [ef]

tw rating 2/5

Long Live The King

Guy Masterson/TII and The Fixed & the Free

Elvis lives on in an Indian woman in Australia in this sparkling one-woman show performed by Ansuya Nathan and directed by Guy Masterson. Heavily pregnant Meena arrives to start her new life in Australia on the day that Elvis dies, and so begins a heart-warming tale as she comes to terms with a new life away from home, without the comforting tones of her King. Nathan skilfully morphs between her different characters, from pesky Australian neighbours to a stellar impression of Elvis himself, in a fantastic performance that deserves considerable praise. Equal praise should go to Masterson, who directs the piece with imagination and panache that hits the mark superbly. A show better than any Elvis tribute artist you'll find.

Assembly @ George Street, 5 - 30 Aug (not 16), 2.00pm (3.05pm), £10.00 - £12.50, fpp 268. [ef]

tw rating 4/5

The Typhoid Marys

City of London Freemen's School

The story of the 'Typhoid Marys', young women, asymptomatic typhoid carriers, forcibly removed from society and institutionalised until death, is both tragic and riveting. As such, Phil Tong's new play about their plight is naturally powerful - you can't help be moved. Unfortunately, it's so much less than it could be, largely due to Tong's script, which is over-wrought and painfully didactic: at the end, the audience is literally instructed to mourn for the Marys. It's not assisted by a young cast who, though showing theatrical promise, uniformly garble their lines. The one exception is Charlotte Duke, a powerful stage presence. Inadvisable symbolic dance woefully interrupts the action. Nevertheless, a compelling story, ultimately told with heart, if not skill.

Quaker Meeting House, 16 - 21 Aug, 2.15pm (3.45pm), £7.50, fpp 300. [kc]

tw rating 3/5

THREEWEEKS IN EDINBURGH

Publishers Chris Cooke, Caroline Moses

Concept and content © ThreeWeeks Publications.

ThreeWeeks Publications is owned by UnLimited Publishing, a division of UnLimited Media, Unicorn House, London, E1 6PJ. Tel: 020 7099 9050.

Daily printing by Smart Design & Print.

