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COMEDY

Alex Horne: Odds

Avalon Promotions Ltd

Is the universe infinite? Do we control our own destinies, or is everything random? And can a comedy routine ever feature too many PowerPoint slides? If you're serious about such philosophical questions, the odds are you're not going to turn to a comedian for the answers. Alex Horne, however, is a man determined to beat the odds, and has accordingly devised a show that is accessible and entertaining but also packs an intellectual punch, as he earnestly explores the subjects of betting and probability. Comfortably slipping between personal anecdote and casual explanations of quantum mechanics, Horne's routine isn't about big laughs, but is always humorous and engaging: going to see this absorbing show really isn't much of a gamble.

Pleasance Courtyard, 4 - 30 Aug (not 16), 8.30pm (9.30pm), £8.00 - £10.50, fpp 133. [ka]

tw rating 4/5

Susan Morrison's 'F' is for . . .

Susan Morrison/The Stand Comedy Club

Susan Morrison didn't make me laugh. I found her observations on myriad topics, from relationships to the dangers of Glasgow and the inane nature of Lidl, facile and obvious. Nary a joke she made was one I hadn't heard before, or indeed made myself. I expect greater innovation and wit from somebody who is funny professionally. However, Susan Morrison made an audience full of strangers cluck, giggle, and nod their heads approvingly. If - and many people seem to - you like your stand-up comics to reinforce notions you already believe and retell jokes you've already heard down the pub - than Morrison should be right in your wheelhouse. Fast-paced comedy for people who are terrified of anything original.

The Stand Comedy Club 2, 6 - 29 Aug, 1.45pm (2.45pm), £8, fpp 128. [kc]

tw rating: 2/5

Eric's Laws Of The Land

Eric

Departing from his previously sea-themed tales, 'Laws Of The Land' is the result of things which niggle away at Eric's patience. The premise of the show is this: 'What isn't a law but should be?' He invites you to sign the petition for his solutions, which include passing laws - on obesity, stone-cladding, toilet seat angles and radio DJ vocabulary - to make the world better. Eric uses multimedia to illustrate his arguments, making this feel a bit more like a presentation than a routine, yet it is unrehearsed and natural enough to be absorbing. The rough-round-the-edges approach puts you at ease; his slapdash style makes for refreshingly honest chat that is inoffensive, witty and will have you nodding your head in agreement.

Just The Tonic at The Caves, 5 - 29 Aug (not 17), 6.00pm (7.00pm), £4.00 - £5.00, fpp59. [cnn]

tw rating 3/5

Tom Allen Toughens Up! Tom Allen

Sporting bright pink trousers and a blue cravat, one can instantly see why Tom Allen may have a tip or two to share on toughening up. Being flamboyantly gay, very posh, yet living in a nasty area with a drug dealer for a neighbour has thrown up some rich material and his set on how to survive as a slender shouldered man is heart wrenchingly funny. Allen has no need to toughen up as it is impossible not to fall in love with him and his brilliantly entertaining life. Truly one of the best anecdotalists around. This clever, thoughtful out comedy on life is an absolute must see.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, 4 - 29 Aug, (not 16), 7.30pm (8.30pm), £7.00 - £10.00, fpp 133. [ka]

tw rating 4/5

Charity Shop Cabaret

Trifle Gathering Productions/PBH's Free Fringe

Vintage. A set of tables, chairs and boxes instantly set this understated comedy back in the 80s. Following the tale of a middle-aged woman from her strict upbringing, through her decision to give up on romance and open a charity shop, the show was thoroughly enjoyable and strangely heartfelt. Detailed characters and well-portrayed relationships were key to this piece, told with energetic movement and passionate voice, and although it was not directly to my taste, the restrained humour appealed to the audience as a whole. With great supporting actors in the form of our heroine's two friends - who embody shyness and eccentricity - this story was well told by performers whose singing voices were as strong as their movement. If you do have a spare hour, go and see this.

The Voodoo Rooms, 9 - 27 Aug, 1.45pm (2.45pm), free, fpp 42. [oib]

tw rating 4/5

The Chelsea Grin Smith and Tuck's Chelsea Grin

The great shame with the 'Chelsea Grin' is that their material has potential. In the hands of a more assured duo, you could imagine their sketches being hilarious - what happens when a man mistakes comic books for medical textbooks? What would a health and safety inspector make of Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory? With refinement, these scenes could be surreal and sardonic. Alas, the men of the Chelsea Grin suffer from a complete lack of comic timing or stage presence. You sense that, when devising the show, they had a funny thought and then put no work into developing it. A dire hour of awkward pauses and audience walk-outs - and the twosome's confidence waned terribly as the show progressed. Tremendously poor.

Laughing Horse @ Espionage, 5 - 29 Aug (not 23), 2.15pm (3.15pm), free, fpp 42. [kc]

tw rating 1/5

Jon Richardson: Don't Happy, Be Worry

Off The Kerb Productions

There can be some incredibly obscure show titles littered through the Fringe programme, but Jon Richards decides to keep it literal as he riffs on how not leading a stressful life is, well, stressful. After some failed audience banter he cracks on with his routine



SNAP OF THE DAY: Frances Ruffelle performs 'Beneath The Dress' at The Pleasance at Ghillie Dhu every night until 30 Aug. Photo: Kate Edwards

consisting of obviously rehearsed improv and he dutifully lets the audience know when to laugh by doing a silly voice, a little dance or inserting a swear word into the punch line, to which the crowd politely chortle. There is a nice cohesiveness running through his set but while each anecdote amuses there is always a noticeable pause between the laughter, but don't worry (that's right) be happy.

Pleasance Courtyard, 4 - 30 Aug (not 16), 7.40pm (8.40pm), £9.50 - £12.00, fpp 81. [ta]

tw rating 3/5

Pros from Dover II

Pros from Dover

In the beginning, I wasn't convinced by these guys. Signposting the beginning and end of each sketch and not giving the show full rein to just flow on seemed clunky and heavy. As soon as the Pros settled into their set, however, this approach became amenable and personable, and they soon blossomed into the innovative and fresh sketch comics that they have been widely, and rightly, billed as. It is on a rare occasion that you come across a bunch whose comedy makes you actually struggle to find a comparison; their material is genuinely and utterly original. The

Pros from Dover are an exciting riot that just should not be missed.

The GRV, 15.20pm, 5 - 29 Aug, £5.00, fpp 111. [mb]

tw rating 4/5

Al Murray: The Pub Landlord's Compete for the Meat

Avalon Promotions Ltd

Everyone who's seen Al Murray perform knows he's at the top of his game. The question remaining, though, is whether his game - being the comic spokesman for jingoistic, chauvinist Britain - is one worth being top of. This show, a laddish, lunchtime pub quiz, showcases his undeniable skills in spontaneous rapport and derision, and the informal set-up reveals him to be an expert compere, directing the quiz with boisterous authority and playing his participants against one another with macho jibes. He's also clever, but has an alienating lack of charm and variety, so when, for example, an audience member admitted to working in health-and-safety, Murray's response was like an achingly predictable Daily Mail headline. A well-loved but wearying comedian.

Pleasance Dome, 16 - 28 Aug, 12.30pm (2pm), £5.00, fpp 23. [kb]

tw rating 3/5

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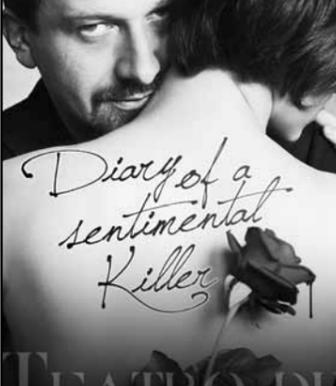
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Superbard - Free Tea Fuelled Art
 Sometimes it takes adversity to show what a performer is capable of. It's not something anyone wants to go through, but a technical hitch that took out half of this show was not enough to dim the affable charisma of this engaging performer, and one of his two planned stories was enough to leave me wanting more. A pleasingly gothic rom-com, the first tale is perfectly pitched; the script is funny, inventively surreal and suits the knowing, offbeat performance style. The atmospheric surrounds of the cave-like venue serve to enhance the experience. Although today the show lacked music, a quick listen to previous recordings served to assure that, hitch sorted, this will be even better. Don't miss it.
 The Banshee Labyrinth, 18 - 28 August, 5.10pm (6.10pm), free, fpp 292. [tc]
 tw rating 4/5

Shakespeare's Shorts Shoe Kuehlmann

This delightful afternoon was filled with lovely sketches based on the works of Shakespeare, each intelligently adapted and highly satirical, including one in which Richard III gives his famous soliloquy speech, whilst the cleaner is voices her own humorous opinions. This light-hearted take on possibly the greatest written work the world has ever seen is a great way to start the afternoon on a high. The rapport between the two actresses is excellent and this helps create an informal atmosphere, which is surely vital to any comedy piece. It only lasted 35 minutes, shorter than it was meant to be, but it truly is Shakespeare like you have never seen it. Well written and performed with expert timing.
 Beehive Inn, 7 - 28 Aug (not 11, 18, 25), 5.00pm (6.00pm), free, fpp122. [tv]
 tw rating 3/5

focuses on Mitchell's fascination with nature. Her abstract works are divided between pastels and large canvases which make you want to get up close to the thickly-layered oils and the fierce, flowing brushstrokes, but you have to stand back to get the full effect. She's at her best when using a smaller palette, as in 'First Cyprus' with its sombre shadows, or the 'Tilleul' sketches, which glow with a garden-after-rain energy, entirely appropriate for summer in Edinburgh. The exhibition concludes with an eighty minute film which gives a psychologically intimate portrait of this important artist.
 It's a refreshing break from the bustle of the Fringe.
 Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh - Inverleith House, 2 Aug - 4 Sep, 10.00am (5.30pm), free, fpp 169. [df]
 tw rating 4/5

singing. Promising poignant moments and potential climaxes were soon ruined by the interference of another unimaginative number. On rereading the programme synopsis I also noticed that some crucial plot details were lost in this noisy barrage. Although this isn't a comedy, you may find yourself laughing at just how much this story isn't worth hearing.
 Spoiltes @ The Merchants' Hall, 15 - 30 Aug, 7.30pm (8.30pm), £5.00-£7.00, fpp 208. [eg]
 tw rating 1/5

care to involve the audience, Morrison has you laughing when you're not caught up in the groove, clapping and toe-tapping when you're not dancing. It's a playful, passionate performance from a real class act.
 The Outhouse, 8 - 12, 14, 16 - 21, 27 - 29 Aug, 7.00pm (8.15pm) £13.00, fpp 175. [df]
 tw rating 4/5

DANCE AND PHYSICAL THEATRE

Cape Dance Company
 Forget insipid, minimalist modern dance and see instead this big and ballsy set of dances from some bracingly uninhibited young people. The first piece sees three sets of dancers weave in and out of one another's narratives, clashing and blurring ballet and jazz and paving a steep gradient of excitement for the show to climb. The dancers are hugely nimble and commanding, steering the show ably through its occasional juvenile or obvious moments. Highlights include a mock-audition in which half-shod hopefuls jostle neurotically for the limelight, some itchy sexy duets ranging from the balletic to the gothic, and a vibrant African finale which is about as celebratory an experience as you're likely to see this year.
 Zoo Roxy, 15 - 29 Aug, 2.30pm (3.30pm), £10.00 - £12.00, fpp 144. [kb]
 tw rating 4/5

Down Over Up Martin Creed
 At the heart of Martin Creed's new exhibition is the Fruitmarket staircase. Transformed into a keyboard which ascends a scale as you move up through the gallery, its notes ring out in varying combinations as you survey Creed's pyramids of chairs, tables and cacti. The work plays with repetition, with objects and forms arranged, at times imperfectly, by colour, tone or size. The work is effective within the context of the white box gallery although little would stand out as an isolated work of art. However, as a minimalist exploration of the relationship between spontaneity and order, pattern and discord, there's a charm in it's simplicity.
 The Fruitmarket Gallery, 6-30 Aug, 10.00am - 7.00pm, free, fpp 167. [cmc]
 tw rating 3/5

Persephone: The Musical
 Pomegranate Productions
 This is that rarest of things, a new musical with a really good score. Fabio D'Andrea has written some excellent music, although despite his exquisite piano accompaniments there are moments that cry out for a full chorus and orchestra. However, the book and production need work. Characters rarely interact with each other and don't participate in dialogue or action between songs, with events swiftly narrated rather than portrayed. There are some beautiful singing voices but very little acting in evidence, and the staging is nothing more than a few perfunctory positionings. The music has the potential to capture the epic myth and personal struggle of Persephone, but as a fully-fledged musical this piece has a way to go yet.
 St Mark's artSpace, 15 - 28 Aug (not 16, 23), times vary, £7.00 - £9.00, fpp 215. [jm]
 tw rating 3/5

THEATRE

The Rope In Your Hands New Salisbury Players
 The effects of a tragedy such as hurricane Katrina cannot be classified merely as broken levees; this is a tragedy that alters a place entirely and scars people that have lived through it. In 'The Rope In Your Hands' playwright Siobhan O' Loughlin has collaged extracts from her interviews of thirteen Katrina survivors to draw an image of post-hurricane New Orleans. The multiple facets of the story are successfully brought out in a script that is engaging and ultimately calls for social activism. Unfortunately, O'Loughlin's acting does not do her script justice. Despite her energy and animation, her characters do not fully spring to life and I found myself wishing I could see videos of the interviews instead.
 Quaker Meeting House, 16 - 28 Aug, 7.10pm (7.55pm), £8.00, fpp 284. [ms]
 tw rating 3/5

Alcatraz Aireborne Theatre

There's no escape from Alcatraz: in this case represented by memories. Our protagonist, a hotel cleaner, is trapped by her own personal history, metaphorically imprisoned by her memories, and this piece sees her lounging on the bed in a hotel room, her 'daydream shelter', as she recalls her life and loves. The stories are enacted by former occupants of the room whose experiences resonate with hers, though they appear dreamlike as the lead character does not have any direct communication with them. The transiency of the room's occupants only serves to highlight the fact that the lead character's own perspective has become fixed over time. Engaging if intense, I felt this rich material needed longer than a one-hour slot.
 Underbelly, Cowgate, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 17, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29 Aug, 12.35pm (1.35pm), £6.50 - £10.00, fpp 223. [cm]
 tw rating 3/5

The Head of the Fork MiddleMan

If you're a twenty-something teetering on the precipice of real life, this tale of apathy and stagnation is sure to speak to you. "Are we there yet?" reads the irrepressible Dom's t-shirt and this question hangs darkly over the play along with others about mortality, independence and loneliness. Fred has lost all motivation and spends his days watching cats stalk and milk ferment. His eccentric housemate's attempts to fire Fred into action result in a bleak comedy reminiscent of 'Peep Show'. The production was easy to relate to, touching and remarkably naturalistic. In fact, it felt so real that afterwards I was left to stew in a philosophical ennui which took hours to shake off. Superb but grimly depressing.
 Zoo Roxy, 6 - 29 Aug, 1.40pm (2.30pm), £5.00 - £8.00, fpp 258. [eg]
 tw rating 4/5

EXHIBITIONS

Joan Mitchell Inverleith House
 Tucked away in one of Edinburgh's most beautiful exhibition spaces, this retrospective

MUSICALS AND OPERA

Ashes Play Mouse Productions
 "My story is worth hearing" urged protagonist Evelyn several times during this performance. Unfortunately, I had to disagree with her; this newly written musical concerning an adulterous husband and his duped wife managed to be both laughably over-dramatic and incredibly uneventful. The tolerable acting was entirely eclipsed by the cast's nasal, off-key and increasingly hysterical

MUSIC

Barbara Morrison - Behind The Green Door
 Outhouse Productions
 When the band begins to play, someone's conspicuously absent. Barbara makes a movie-star entrance fashionably late, glowing and vivacious. After twelve years at the Fringe and seven touring with Ray Charles before that, she's a confident pro, and she's here to have fun. With a powerful voice that fills the intimate loft space, she delivers soulful numbers tinged with blues and funk, ably backed by the Tom Finley Trio, who play it hot and fast, punctuating the songs with accomplished solo flurries. Taking

THREEWEEKS IN EDINBURGH

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 Daily printing by Smart Design & Print.

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