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CABARET

Vive Le Cabaret

Pleasance/Desmond O'Connor/Blond Ambition
The Ghillie Dhu has to be one of the hippest venues at the Fringe, with its retro restaurant/nightclub vibe, nigh on perfect for some glitz, glamour and Cabaret. The diversity of the evening's show is a winding roller-coaster of frivolity, from brass bands belting out 'Ace of Spades' to melodious and awe inspiring pieces of Spanish guitar and tap dancing from 'Tap Ole'. The entertainment is raucous, the crowd rowdy, after the comedy and capers simmer down, the night is capped by an absolutely show stealing performance from kamikaze songstress Meow Meow. No night will be the same, but no night shall disappoint, Vive Le Cabaret indeed.

Pleasance at Ghillie Dhu, 4 - 30 Aug (not 23), 9.30pm (10.45pm), £10.50 - £12.50, fpp 220. [to]
tw rating 4/5

CHILDREN'S SHOWS

Alice in Wonderland Uncontained Arts

This vibrant version of 'Alice in Wonderland' is a high-octane and disorientating whizz through the classic tale. Three actors play each of the parts and, although the cast are talented, versatile and energetic, it slightly lacks the surreal sparkle that would transform this into something magical. Met at the door by a childish endearing Alice, who gleefully exclaims 'I'm in this play!' each performer bounds over to chat and introduce themselves to everyone. Although this is a personal and connective touch, we're consequently left sitting around for too long waiting for everything to begin. However, what follows is an amusing and occasionally inventive interpretation, particularly the use of water pistols for Alice's melodramatic tears. More interactive moments would be welcome.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, 4 - 29 Aug (not 19), 1.00pm (2.00pm), £5.00 - £9.50, fpp 10. [gjs]
tw rating 3/5

Fairy Fail Tumbleweed Theatrical Productions

Although this production isn't a fail, it's not a fairytale success either. Centring around Brownlocks, and her quest to find her missing, golden-haired sister, we meet parodies of stock fairytale characters, amongst them a feeble ninja wolf and a disgustingly greedy Hansel and Gretel gorging on strawberry laces. Brownlocks' song and the accompanying music seem half-hearted, and the keyboard player looks bored throughout. However, a burst of energy comes from the male actors who clown around and cross-dress with panache. Overall though, 'Fairy Fail' is as flimsy as the rainbow backdrop the actors trip over and almost knock down, and it's telling that this was probably the funniest moment. Highly predictable - there's nothing here you won't have seen before.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, 4 - 30 Aug (not 18), 10.30am (11.20am), £6.00 - £8.00, fpp 11. [gjs]
tw rating 2/5



SNAP OF THE DAY: Jarred Christmas is almost certainly wondering what page his interview will be on in tomorrow's ThreeWeeks weekly edition. Photo: James Robertson

Dr Bunhead is Volcano Head Dr Bunhead

"Don't try this at home!" warns mad scientist Dr Bunhead as he sets his head on fire, provoking screams of twisted delight from fascinated children. Managing to make chemistry lessons fun, Bunhead ignites colourful fiery tornadoes, hurls liquid nitrogen everywhere and plays with the stuff inside glow-sticks, creating plenty of big bangs and messy explosions that are enjoyable, interesting and occasionally heart-stopping. Although Bunhead spends too long introducing the show, and I find myself willing him to get cracking with the dangerous, wacky experiments, once he gets going it becomes an effervescent firecracker of fun, packed with corrosive chemicals and crazy capers. If you're looking for something educational, a touch scatological and very silly, then this is a good bet.

C plaza, 18 - 30 Aug (not 23, 24), 11.00am (12.00pm), £7.50 - £10.50, fpp 11. [gjs]
tw rating 4/5

The Railway Children Sell a Door Theatre Company in Association With Open Doors

'The Railway Children' is, if you'll forgive the overused phrase, a much-loved children's classic, and quite rightly so: it possesses a charming naivety, and a reassuringly optimistic morality. This production is faithful to the original, both in language and tone, and it features some interesting staging. The flash-backs - acted out in moody lighting while other characters narrate - are particularly striking. The only flaw is in the overly stagy delivery of a number of lines; the dialogue has a 'Famous Five', lashings of ginger beer twang that feels forced, unnatural and unconvincing. If you can look past this though, you will enjoy it as a nostalgic romp through a decent, ide-

alised Britain of yesteryear that never really existed off the page.

C plaza, 5 - 30 Aug (not 16), 2.45pm (3.45pm), £5.50 - £9.50, fpp 16. [al]
tw rating 3/5

COMEDY

Tim FitzHigham: Gentlemen Adventurer

Brett Vincent for getcomedey.com by arrangement with PBJ Management

Tim FitzHigham is certifiably insane. He has sailed a Victorian roll top bath across the channel, rowed a paper boat down the Thames and, morris danced from London to Norwich, all in the name of generating material to amuse the fringe crowd; this year, however, he took some time off from his mad-cap antics to get married and have a baby. Luckily, the success of his show doesn't rest on the outrageousness of the stunt but on the mad way he sees the world. His wide eyed stare, exuberant energy and his unshaken belief that anything is possible means that no matter what tale he is spinning, he is a true delight to behold.

Pleasance courtyard, 12-30 Aug, 7.30pm (8.30pm), £9.00 - £12.00, fpp 132. [ka]
tw rating 4/5

Delete The Banjax... and you!

Mick Perrin for Just for Laughs Live

Delete the Banjax have pulled off another corker of a show. The incredibly talented and eccentric foursome were slated for great things by the critics last year, and they have certainly lived up to expectations. Their playful

sketch show brilliantly blurred the boundaries between improvised and prepared, leaving the audience reeling at their impressive comic timing. Totally off the wall and surreal, some sketches were so funny in parts that even the cast were in hysterics. All four actors brought something different to the table, but special mention must be given to Dan, whose energy levels could blow up a small hamlet. Surreal, energetic, hysterically funny, missing this act would be like skipping Christmas.

Pleasance Courtyard, 4 - 30 Aug (not 17), 5.45pm (6.45pm), £7.00 - £9.50, fpp 55. [ka]
tw rating 5/5

Maevie Higgins - Personal Best

Lisa Richards Ltd. In Association With EdCom

Maevie Higgins comes to the Fringe prepared with animal facts, bodily insecurities, and a language workshop for those that need a crash course in comprehending Irish accents. Such a gimmick proves necessary when excitement speeds her pacing to euphoric but it is nevertheless highly entertaining. The set takes a while to build momentum and find confidence, but when it does the material is bound together by the eccentric allure of Higgins's quaintness, and an endearingly self-deprecating undertone. Her material seems to deviate from the norm; a family-strewn audience has her straying from wider material towards familiar anecdotes; where this is often indicative of waning audience engagement, in this case everyone appears receptive and enthralled.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, 4 - 30 Aug (not 16), 4.30pm (5.30pm), £8.00 - £12.00, fpp 91. [np]
tw rating 3/5

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age. This show is powerful, remarkable and delivered by a genuinely brilliant actor: a true Fringe triumph.
 Udderbelly's Pasture, 7-30 Aug (Not 16), 1.55pm (3.10pm) £11.00 - £13.50, fpp 293. [mb]
 tw rating 5/5

The Real MacGuffins Real MacGuffins

An interesting take on the sketch show format, in which most of the laughs come from the dysfunctional dynamic between these three very funny men. As James May is picked on in 'Top Gear', so poor sweet 'Matt the Cat' was clearly established as the show bitch from the word go. His attempts to do voices were cruelly culled, and he was constantly being forced to move chairs and pick up props. When the material left off the theme of bossing Matt around, the sketches were independently very funny, even though some topics were firmly entrenched in the ditch marked 'school boy humour'; there was a song about pubs, for instance, and a disgusting opener about weeing in crisps. However, the cast are so talented that they carry it off, and push it convincingly to its far fetched conclusion.

Pleasance Courtyard, 7-29 Aug, 10.45pm (11.45pm), £7.50 - £11.00, fpp 113. [ka]
 tw rating 4/5

The Superhero Improv Show Improv Jam

Do you like Superheroes? Well it doesn't really matter, because this ramshackle improv show makes little effort to use its title theme. Based on audience suggestions, a completely original plot unfolds each and every night; well, not entirely original, as there is an obvious set of scenes prepared to fit to the evening's material. Perhaps better viewed as a stage school workshop rather than a comedy show, it is mostly unfunny and, owing to a lack of microphones, occasionally inaudible. The end product is a stilted, stuttering show that takes a festival audience desperate to have a good time and finally breaks them; in this epic battle, no one wins.

Voodoo Rooms, 16-27 Aug, 8.00pm (9.00pm), free, fpp 127. [ta]
 tw rating 2/5

Susan Calman Chats Up...

Objective Talent Management
 There are a number of chat shows on the Fringe now, but where Calman's show differs is in just how damned funny it is. Of course it's no surprise that the guests' performances - on this occasion Matt Green and Caroline Rhea - and Calman's own intro were slick and well timed. But the magic is in her ability to deliver fun, entertaining banter that is

actually, genuinely funny - every bit as a funny as her stand up. There is no 'One Show' awkwardness here, nor is it blighted by the vacuous, artificial pleasantries that so often mar this type of show. The performers were utterly at ease, often laughing every bit as hard as the audience, who were constantly in stitches.

Just The Tonic At The Caves, C plaza, 5-29 Aug (not 9-10, 23-24), 12.55pm (2.10pm), £8.00 - £9.00, fpp 128. [al]
 tw rating 4/5

Diane Spencer: Lost In The Mouth Specific-Free Diane Spencer/PBH's Free Fringe

I thought in the beginning that I wanted to take Diane Spencer home for tea to meet my mother. After her hour of decadent wickedness, guts, and body fluids, however, I'm not sure mother dearest would approve. Spencer approaches her stand up with such an affable humility she might have you thinking of the girl next door, but she swiftly turns heads as she gushes the deliciously dirty, raucously rude and delightfully intelligent talent that she is being praised for. You will love it if you want a raucous afternoon of the visceral and the cervical. My mum might not approve, but I certainly did.

Opium, 7-28 Aug (not 12, 17, 23), 4.00pm (5.00pm), free, fpp 55. [mb]
 tw rating 4/5

John Cooper Clarke

Many artists age badly: examples of this in rock music, film and television are plentiful. Poetry seems to be a kinder mistress, however, as John Cooper Clarke's show was energetic from the moment he stepped on stage. He covered a variety of topics from sex and relationships to his home-town in Northern England, to television and film and people who he claims 'stole his titles'. Witty poems were delivered with verve and his commentary established his image as the epitome of cool. Some of the pieces he re-told were clearly well known, and 'Chicken Town' received enormous applause before it had even begun. His new material received similar praise, demonstrating his continued ability to entertain.

Udderbelly's Pasture, 13-19 Aug, 11.30pm (12.30pm), £11.50 - £15.00, fpp 79. [ajb]
 tw rating 4/5

The Godley Hour Janey Godley

Transforming the Queen Dome into an environment a little like a local pub, Janey Godley has the audience in stitches with her chirpy chatting before the hour even commences. What follows is an hour with an incredibly friendly, humble and downright funny personality who recounts various tales from her life in a refreshingly off the cuff manner, incorporating talk of a vegetarian sex party and Susan Boyle eating crayons along the way. The scenes she describes are depicted with such vivid imagery that the hour passes incredibly quickly and while some of the subject matter sometimes falls a bit flat, Godley is a truly gifted and enrapturing storyteller, with an incredibly funny show.

Pleasance Dome, 4-30 Aug, 7.00pm (8.00pm), £10.50 - £12.50, fpp 67. [lvs]
 tw rating 4/5

THEATRE

Keepers Pleasance And Plasticine Men

Based on a true story, 'Keepers' delves into the lives of two men tending to a lighthouse on the Welsh coast some 200 years ago. Using little more than a ladder and trap door for a set, this production showcases physical theatre at its best, as the actors convey their surroundings through mime and sound. Beautifully crafted, and with original music, this is a despondent tale of loneliness and the descent into insanity, where the relationship between the two men is one that is both touching and amusing. It's a remarkable feat that the inner workings of the lighthouse are made visible to the audience, as an imaginary set is crafted out of nothing, and the viewer is transported to the world of the two Thomases.

Pleasance Courtyard, 4-30 Aug (not 11, 18), 4.00pm (5.00pm), £5.00 - £11.00, fpp 264. [aa]
 tw rating 4/5

Moment House

Firefly Productions (USA) and Scallabouche (Hungary)
 If one of the reasons why you go to the theatre is to be moved, then you can't miss 'Moment House'. Four men are connected to each other through one of their number, a freedom fighter that had to leave Hungary

for America and left a son behind in both.

This is a play about affection, miscommunication and its effects on relationships, and the masterfully written script, one of the best I've come across, is done justice by the outstanding cast. The superb performances, which counterbalance the lack of set and the few props, make the characters so real that you keep thinking about them after the show. Despite the tech being problematic, this was a flawless performance.

C aquila, 18-30 Aug, 1.00pm (2.15pm), £6.50 - £9.50, fpp 272. [clm]
 tw rating 5/5

See Me! Hear Me!

Kathleen Ann Thompson/Belleherst Productions
 "The purpose of theatre is to show the truth" claims writer, performer and human rights activist Kathleen Thompson, and here she does that unflinchingly, even when the truth in question is shocking. Tackling the deplorable global industry of human trafficking, she draws together real-life characters, facts and figures in a performance that's part play, part lecture. At times, her desire to convey her outrage through information overtakes her ability to stage something artistic; a numbing slide-show of statistics and awkward moments of physical theatre do nothing to lift the overlong script. There are better plays on this subject, but there's no doubting Thompson's sincerity, or the immediate importance of her subject. As theatre, it's flawed, but it's painfully truthful.

Quaker Meeting House, 16-21, 23-28 Aug, times vary, £6.00 - £8.00, fpp 286. [df]
 tw rating 3/5

The Tailor Of Inverness

Dogstar Theatre Company
 Scottish actor Matthew Zajac brings forward the story of his Polish father landing in Scotland after escaping from Soviet and German occupied Europe. It's at once an affectionate tribute to his father, and a moving account of the way the war ravaged the furthest reaches of this continent, and Zajac shines as a storyteller in this tale of compulsion and intrigue. Alongside atmospheric, timely, and pertinent live violin, Zajac weaves a wonderful story that slowly enters into a deeper analysis of the history, conveying the energy of his father's youth, and the touching compassion of his old

Up2D8 Thorablot/PBH's Free Fringe

A merry band of three versatile actresses perform nine comic sketches about the trials and tribulations of online dating and the use of technology as modern day matchmaker. The women we meet, most of who are American characters, display a spectrum of approaches to love in cyberspace; they are knowing, cynical, doubtful, determined, romantic, and vengeful. All the tales are glossed with light-hearted humour and delivered with good comic timing. The monologues never stray into more serious or complex territory, but leave the audience to draw what conclusions they can from the brief vignettes sketched by the punchy script. Though this show is at times too simple, there are enough jokes and wry observations to entertain us well.

Sin Club and Lounge, 16-26 Aug, 3.10pm (4.10pm), free, fpp 301.
 tw rating 3/5
 [dp]

Whenever I Get Blown Up I Think of You

Molly Naylor/ Escalator East to Edinburgh/Apples & Snakes

Molly Naylor is wise beyond her years, perhaps because surviving the 7/7 bombings was a maturing experience. She has a view of humanity that is both cynical and optimistic, and in this highly personal show she tells her life story as it leads to and recovers from her fateful tube-journey. I do not wish to call her skills as a poet into question, but I found her moments of simple, confessional anecdote most affecting (a scene, for instance, in which she watches her father skinning a deer), while being wildly put off by her obstructive insistence on affected rhymes and pseudo-poetical syntax. She performs well, and has much of interest to say, but needs not obstruct or over-decorate her material.

The Zoo, 6-30 Aug (not 17, 24), 1.55pm (2.55pm), £5.00 - £7.50, fpp 340. [kb]
 tw rating 3/5

Still Spilling the Beans: Letters from East Ham Vicarage 1953 - 1956

Margot, Rupert and Lisa
 The Revd Lisa Wright has the softest touch in the handling of her material, extracts from the letters her mother sent in the 50s from the Vicarage in East Ham. Sentimentality and indulgence are totally alien to her as she delivers, with calm tenderness, these time-capsules from a lost pocket of impoverished post-war London, and as such, the little lives of its inhabitants take on a colour and significance that is both heartening and rare. It is slow-paced yet often funny and, while more hectic fringe-goers might not call this the most thrilling show at the festival, for others there is a thrill in the unaffected presentation of true life, for which there is no substitute.

The Vault, 17-30 Aug (not 22, 23, 29), 11.30am (12.20pm), £5.50 - £7.00 fpp 291. [kb]
 tw review 4/5

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