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The Melody Blog a modern musical



FRINGE REVIEW

COMEDY

Luke Wright's Cynical Ballads

Ditto Productions / Escalator East To Edinburgh / LakinMcCarthy

Fusing poetry with a kind of gentle rap, Luke Wright's Cynical Ballads is a tidy exploration of social culture and political hypocrisy. While perhaps failing to capture the true lyrical finesse and creativity of more underground artists such as Riz MC, Wright appeals to a much wider audience by employing projected images which assist the narrative and through line of his show. From hating on the government to looking at adolescent relationships, Wright creates this kind of warm nostalgia and flourishes in rhyming verse while looking at how poetry as an art form has influenced and informed the public. Intuitive and discerning, Wright's set is one that confronts our collective evils without preaching about them.

Underbelly, 4 - 28 Aug (not 16), 4.15pm (5.15pm), £8.50 - £10.50, fpp111. tw rating 4/5 [ajj]

Stephens And Thomas

Juliet Stephens And Matt Thomas/PHB Free Fringe

This free show started off on a high, mainly due to the gang of whooping drunk females up the rear of an upstairs back room of Sin Club. It was then downhill from the first ten minutes, when even the drunkards got fed-up screeching woos at generic, rather limp middle-class jokes from a seemingly miserable Matt Thomas. The atmosphere seemed to freeze with every gag; the finale from Thomas was a painful collection of puns and a cryptic spider joke. Juliet Stephens took over halfway, raising the temperature slightly, with tales of her time as a writer and teacher, plus a few rude jokes. 'Stephens And Thomas' offer a disappointing evening, even if it was free.

Sin Club and Lounge, 6 - 27 Aug, 8.00pm (9.00pm), free, fpp155. tw rating 2/5 [lc]

Jollyboat

Jollyboat / PBH's Free Fringe

'Jollyboat' is the first Fringe show to have made me laugh until I cried. Unfortunately, the hilarity was specific to the performance I saw - the lights rebelled and the microphones wouldn't work so the cast decided to give up on the material they'd prepared and trash the stage instead. Assuming this is an accidental one off, means that such amusement is not guaranteed. I am certain, however, that this assortment of comic songs will always be very silly. The opening songs and 'pirate pop medley' with which the show ends are brilliant. However, not all of the songs were as good; the Hitler/'Imagine' mash-up is a particular low point. All in all, though, a fantastically mad and jolly hour.

The Voodoo Rooms, 6 - 27 Aug (not 7, 17), 1.45pm (2.45pm), free, fpp101. tw rating 3/5 [lm]

The Tim Vine Chat Show

Bound And Gagged Comedy

If you're planning a whole comedy show based around talking to audience members on stage, you'd better pray you don't get

twits for guests. This is a shame, because Tim Vine was unlucky enough to pick me. Aside from the confirmation that comedy is not the route for yours truly to go down, this really is standard Tim Vine (puns aplenty) but with the twist of every show being different. Watching Vine come up with jokes on the spot illustrates the skill that separates him from many others, and although he does sometime fail to think of a witty response, this is a slick show with plenty of laughs - even with that terrible second guest.

Pleasance Courtyard, 3 - 29 Aug (not 10, 17), 3.45pm (4.45pm), £11.00 - £13.50, fpp159. tw rating 4/5 [ljc]

Richard Herring's Edinburgh Fringe Podcast

Richard Herring / The Stand Comedy Club

The King of Edinburgh (see ThreeWeeks Issue 1) has a lot on his plate at the moment. As we speak, he's writing a Radio Four programme and performing a stand-up show, but still finds time to record a daily podcast with a host of special guest comedians. Conversation covers the topic of his guests' own shows as well as touching on Herring's personal life, and revealing a startling amount of information about his past relationships with fellow celebrities. He touches on whatever comes to mind or is in the news - the riots and other topics not for the faint-hearted. In a venue so intimate, Herring can hold eye-contact with all of the audience in turn, which makes this an unmatched experience for his fans.

The Stand Comedy Club, 3 - 29 Aug (not 4, 15), 2:20pm (3:20pm), £8.00 - £10.00, fpp140 tw rating 3/5 [ja]

Rowena Haley: Nothing to Write Home About

R Haley / PBH's Free Fringe

Accompanied by a baby-blue guitar and a collection of holiday snaps, Rowena Haley goes through the ups and downs of her past. Delivering her material in a somewhat cynical manner, she blends songs with stories to reasonable effect. Moments of her show shine with wit and intelligence but unfortunately the rest is hampered by Haley's adherence to humour surely only fit for friends and family, complete with in-jokes and references that are difficult to follow. It's really frustrating when it is obvious that she has a lot to offer in the way of comedy. Perhaps if she focused more on a general audience rather than those who are close to her, she would see herself achieving far more success.

Southsider, 6 - 27 Aug, 5.45pm (6.35pm), free, fpp144. tw rating 2/5 [aa]

Seann Walsh: Ying And Young

Off The Kerb Productions

Seann Walsh makes his way to the heart of his audience with some fairly dated observations about social relationships, and this crowd-pleasing performance doesn't have much more to it. Whilst he generates laughter throughout, some gags aren't too dissimilar from those at a 90s Lee Evans gig, and there's even a joke I've heard in 'Friends' before about where to point your



SNAP OF THE DAY: Just in case you wondered what he looks like with clothes on. Kai Humphries' 'Bare-Faced Cheek' at the Udderbelly Pasture. Photo: Kat Gollock

furniture. Yet his energetic performance and obvious enthusiasm for what he does render some jokes about modern technology and culture hilarious, providing a firm connection between audience and performer. He is a masterful storyteller and anecdotalist; by writing a sharper set on slighter issues which he can coax and expand upon with trademark flair, Walsh could become incredibly successful.

Pleasance Courtyard, 3 - 28 Aug (not 15), 8.15pm (9:15pm), £8.50 - £11.00, fpp148. tw rating 3/5 [ajj]

The Big Value Comedy Show - Late

Just The Tonic

The Caves is such an unpleasant venue: it takes ages to file in, it's hot, there are two toilets for 100+ people, water drips down the walls, and the air can't be too good for you. All this creates a pressure-cooker environment for stand-up comedy. Combined with short set times and a quick turnover of comedians, the night-time delights on offer

here only enhance the frenetic environment; it all creates an intimate, catalytic atmosphere, which is perfect for a spot of late-night comedy to end the day. Easily the best on the night I went was the effortlessly hilarious Carl Hutchinson, who captivates the audience with his perfectly timed suspenseful silences and plain-talking sense-making. An intense but worthwhile night.

Just The Tonic At The Caves, 4 - 28 Aug (not 17), 9.00pm (10.10pm), £5.00 - £10.00, fpp49. tw rating 4/5 [jh]

The Comedy Reserve

Pleasance

I'm a sympathiser by nature; when someone in front of me does something awkwardly, I cringe, mortified on their behalf. I'm sorry to say that cringe I did, more than once, at 'The Comedy Reserve'. The jokes, for the most part, were passable. A reliance on sexual puns by Luke Benson was unfortunately

cont>>

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cont>> predictable. The final act, Julian Dean, offered a welcome change of pace and tone with his confident and casual delivery. However, stealing the show was the MC, Joe Lycett. His anecdotal comedy, combined with a wonderful, almost confiding, manner, had us rewed up for comedy that didn't quite live up to the high standard set by his introductions. A pity.

Pleasance Dome, 3 – 29 Aug (not 15, 22), 9.30pm (10.30pm), £6.50 - £9.00, fpp62. tw rating 3/5 [ct]

The Showcase Show

EdCom & Dick The Horse

Whipping up a selection of the best comedy acts of the Festival into a delicious bite-sized chunk, 'The Showcase Show' returns for its eighth triumphant year. Promising “the best and brightest comics”, it offers several helpings of different performers previewing samples from their shows, so it's a brilliant way to discover new talent and decide which shows to see later on in the day. They say variety is the spice of life, and with a different line-up every day, you can go back again and again. It does mean, however, that the success of each show depends on who is performing on each specific day. Judging by today, though, it's worth the risk. A perfect lunchtime treat.

Pleasance Courtyard, 5 – 27 Aug, 1.10pm (2.10pm), £7.00-£9.50, fpp151 tw rating 4/5 [am]

88MPH

Rogue Lounge

Rogue Lounge have some great ideas for sketches. What if Superman was Welsh? What if a gay Dr Who landed in Narnia? What if God and Richard Dawkins had a fight? Unfortunately, the writing isn't good enough to properly develop these ideas. Promising sketches frequently fall flat due to a basic lack of funny jokes, and too often they seem to think that putting on a regional accent is an acceptable substitute for actual material. They also have a habit of throwing in rather dated cultural references: do we really need more 'Lord Of The Rings' sketches? They have their occasional moments though, and show themselves to be competent performers, albeit without a great act to perform.

Just The Tonic At The Caves, 4 - 28 Aug (not 17), 11.40pm (12.40am), £7.50, fpp70. tw rating 2/5 [im]

Rita Trump And Julie Jones: Screw Loose Women – Free

Rita Trump And Julie Jones / Laughing Horse Free Festival

A double act of character actors, there was little to find here that wasn't conventional: the characters were classic examples of stereotypes. First up was Rita Trump, a socially awkward virginal stand-up who struggled through her set, with some of her puns getting big laughs but others being too predictable. Imogen Thomas - a more experienced comedian, and all the better for it - played Julie Jones, a chav mother of eight, rolling out the standards of the stereotype: drinking, shoplifting, and bad parenting. Taking a turn for the better, the set culminated in a comedy strip tease to the theme of Casualty. Hopefully this duo will renovate their hackneyed characters with time.

Laughing Horse @ Edinburgh City Football Club, 8 – 27 Aug, 5.35pm (6.35pm), free, fpp141. tw rating 2/5 [jfb]

Billy Kirkwood: Show Me Your Tattoo - Free

Billy Kirkwood

This tattooed, hairy Scotsman is possibly one of the funniest comedians at the Fringe. With a totally original premise - showing random photos of horrible tattoos that Billy has never seen before, then making up most of his routine on the spot - I honestly can't believe this show was for free. He offers audience members a chance to bust out their own tattoos and claims by the end of the Fringe he'll have seen more inked up penises than anyone alive. In between the hilarity, Billy draws tattoo suggestions from the audience on a white board, with the promise to get one of them at the end of the festival. He does a children's show too – hopefully without the nudity.

Laughing Horse @ The White Horse, 5 - 27 Aug, 4.00pm (4.50pm), free, fpp49. tw rating 5/5 [tw]

3 Comics To Midnight

3 Comics To Midnight / PBH's Free Fringe

Three students - Steven, Eddie and Redman - each take a 20 minute set, counting down to midnight. Steven and Redman are both very good, balancing physical comedy with

witty observation, and bantering relatively successfully with an unhelpfully reticent audience. Poor Eddie - bless his socks - although also witty, has the delivery of a stoned newsreader, and would probably be better suited to writing material than performing it. All in all, the show provokes the same reaction as when a friend tells you a technically comic story – you mechanically register its hilarity, but for some reason don't laugh. The frustrated students leave the stage looking like their audience has just dumped them with the line, "It's not you, it's me...".

Globe, 6 - 27 Aug, 23.00 pm (00.00am), free, fpp158. tw rating 3/5 [ld]

Mickey Anderson Unlocks The Key To Human Happiness

We Happy Few / PBH's Free Fringe

Who are the ideal punters for a comedian to rip to shreds? Disruptive, disorderly drunks, surely? Not for Mickey Anderson. When the A-Team turns up, he seems quite put out not to be able to share his more cerebral comedy. Quoting poetry and philosophers in a quest to find the formula for human happiness, Mickey's geeky charm is at times sentimental. Occasionally the material feels laboured – especially the time spent discussing internet viral sensations, but despite this, his delivery is great and there are witty moments. Although, you may feel like you're back in school that one Friday afternoon, when an awkward teacher discloses life lessons that everyone already knew – and in this case, loses control of the class.

The Banshee Labyrinth, 19 - 27 Aug , 7.15pm (8.15 pm), free, fpp n/a tw rating 3/5 [hd]

Moonshine And Trumpery

Gerry Howell / PBH's Free Fringe

Mr Howell is one canny jewel at the Free Fringe. The set is stripped of fluff and performance jumble, and in its stead is just a man - a funny man - chatting about the universe, death and badgers. This doesn't sound like ground-breaking stand up material, and it's not, but his voice and the workings of his mind are what make it fresh. His clever humour has a shade of darkness to it, and the material is made all the more engaging with his eloquent delivery. Howell quotes his grandmother quoting James Dean (they used to hang out): "Dream as if you'll live forever, live as if you'll die tomorrow". If you were living by that adage, I'd go see this show.

The Voodoo Rooms, 6 – 27 Aug, 2.40pm (3.40pm), free, fpp121. tw rating 4/5 [db]

Richard Sandling Performs Music And Comedy As Pot Pourri And Does Some Poetry As Spak Whitman

Richard Sandling / PBH's Free Fringe

At first you might mistake Richard Sandling for his own techie – so intent is he on being self-sufficient, he acts as a special guest twice in his own show. He first features as failed folk-rock star Pot Pourri, and then as thug-poet Spak Whitman, whose powerful poems are a touch on the too serious side, but still show a wonderfully distinct character. Acting as himself and his own compere, Sandling understands he has to work hard and coaxes surprising enthusiasm from even the smallest of afternoon crowds, never missing an opportunity to make us laugh. The show's format means we get the benefits of a variety show but still get to spend the whole hour with the quick-witted Sandling.

The Canon's Gait, 6 – 28 Aug (not 18), 2.25pm (3.25pm), free, fpp140. tw rating 3/5 [ja]

Bridget Christie: Housewife Surrealist

Bridget Christie / The Stand Comedy Club

Having doused her audience with holy water and hurled communion wafers into the crowd like transubstantiated Frisbees, she removed her bishop's hat and finally began her set. But it's not quite as easy to remove Christie's comedy from her Catholic faith – this is though, I believe, a good thing and definitely to her credit. Few comics approach the well-trodden ground of religion from quite her angle, and she's very comfortable in simultaneously pointing out the nonsensical foibles of her faith whilst presenting a wonderfully measured attitude to her Catholic upbringing. She explored the similarities between comedians and priests, the theological dichotomies which arise when your husband's a "depressing" atheist, plus, the miniature re-enactment of

The Ascension alone was certainly worth a watch.

The Stand Comedy Club II, 4 – 28 Aug (not 15), 4.40pm (5.40pm), £7.00 - £8.00, fpp52. tw rating 3/5 [jlb]

THEATRE

Posthumous Works

Ivan Hansen In Collaboration With Out Of Balanz

Ivan Hansen blends the line between character and reality; he greets us, escorts us upstairs, and also joins us for a drink after the show, leaving the line between the two ambiguously drawn. The production creates a charming mode of story telling that is comic and engaging. The direct and simple narrative, much in the style of French comic writer and animator, Sylvain Chomet, centres around a lost bicycle and an old/new gramophone. There is a sense of escapism watching the performance, as it captures a childlike sentiment – I expected this style to become grating after a time, but it was, contrarily, highly engaging, and Hansen's lack of inhibition creates a feeling of wonderment and an enviable sense of play.

Danish Institute, 16 - 27 Aug, 5.00pm (6.00pm), £8.00 - £10.00, fpp n/a. tw rating 4/5 [db]

The Forum

Siren's Production Company

Strong staging and central performances raise this questionable script into something quite impressive. 'The Forum' refers to an internet forum – something, it seems, that is fast becoming a new aspect of the cultural zeitgeist for playwrights to explore. The characters each go by their handles for most of the play – BrokenAndLonely, JustMeOnlyMe, etc. Whilst online, their speech is directed at the audience, even though they're conversing with the character who is physically located next to them. It's a clear nod to compartmentalised relationships on the internet, but unfortunately the story itself is a fairly typical one that lifts current tabloid themes of cyber bullying, teenage alcoholism, and closeted homosexuality, so that by the play's conclusion it feels more like box ticking than plot.

Underbelly, 4 – 28 Aug (not 15), 11.15pm (0.15am), £8.00 - £10.50, fpp263. tw rating 3/5 [jfb]

VOICES

A journey around the world is what they promised, and boy howdy, did they deliver with style. We were given a brief introduction to the cast members and where they were from, which, in my head, immediately gave them authority to create world music, in the truest sense. They then took us around the world using only their voices. Many different languages were used, which meant that half the time I hadn't an idea what they were singing about – but it didn't matter. The cast members were all great vocalists, the beat boxing was exceptionally mind blowing, the different styles and genres were blended seamlessly together, and their smiles were utterly infectious. The night appropriately culminated in a much deserved standing ovation.

New Town Theatre, 4 - 28 Aug (not 16), 7.15pm (8.30pm), £9.00 - £13.00, fpp309. tw rating 4/5 [db]

Pleasance Bytes

Pleasance Theatre

Celebrated journalist and critic Mark Fisher is full of warmth and humour when speaking to his guests, who come from their own respective shows and offer an unique insight into life on the stage. Fisher is the perfect host, and what shines through is his experience in theatre and depth of knowledge of his guests who speak to us during these interviews about their lives back-stage in the shows we wait so eagerly to see. This weekly podcast comes from the very heart of the Fringe, breaking down the actor-audience barriers that still exist and allowing us to ask questions of theatrical greats. This kind of show is why the Fringe is the biggest arts festival in the world – and the best.

Pleasance Courtyard, 13, 20, 27Aug, 12.00pm (12.45pm), £5.00, fpp n/a tw rating 4/5 [ja]

The Ducks

Human Hand / SEAxED

This perceptive play explores the unlikely friendship between two young men: one a 'lad', the other a nerdy video game

expert. At first the lad scorns the nerd, but when the lad's family life disintegrates, he becomes entirely dependent upon him. Lamentably, the lad must face up to the fact that caring for a sitting duck – whether it be a socially inept young man, or literally, a feathered friend from the nearby stream – makes you vulnerable, too. The constant rearrangement of the two boxes which constitute the set is irritating, but this is a touching story, snappily choreographed, with dashes of tremendous humour. Both Dean Ashton (lad) and Thomas Morrison (nerd) are ideally suited to their roles.

Pleasance Courtyard, 3 - 29 Aug, 3.25pm (4.25pm), £7.50 - £10.00, fpp258. tw rating 4/5 [jk]

Free Time Radical

The Frequency D'ici / New Wolsey Theatre / Escalator East To Edinburgh

Following a world-changing tsunami, we're told that London is submerged. Two survivors ration their food, play Monopoly and the guitar, while trying to cope with their losses: Jensen's lost his wife; Ali, his mother. Mixing humour and surreal scenes, it at first seems that the two aren't taking events seriously, but this is a subtle suggestion of later events in the play – a brave decision, as it may have lost the support of their audience. The relationship between the two strangers holds the play together, never seeming contrived; there are moments of synchronicity and jarring difference. A mostly engrossing hour, the last act doesn't hold as tightly together as the first, but an attentive audience will follow it.

Pleasance Courtyard, 3 - 28 Aug (not 9, 16, 23), 1.10pm (2.20pm), £9.00 - £12.00, fpp264. tw rating 3/5 [jfb]

Midnight Your Time By Diana Quick

HighTide Festival Theatre / Escalator East To Edinburgh

“You know me. I'm fine, as long as I know. Lots of love, be safe.” This typical mother-daughter conflict is presented in a most intriguing way. The daughter works hands-on in Palestine for a NGO. Her ex-lawyer mother wants her to come home and start making a life by lobbying in the UK. They agree to video-chat once a week; after an argument, however, the daughter is never online. Through the mother's monologue, the audience also meet the neighbours, the father and the new Afghan refugee. Diane Quick as Judy portrays a tough yet fragile woman in which every daughter will see something of her own mother, and the webcam close-ups add another level to this multilayered show.

Assembly George Square, 3 - 28 Aug (not 8, 15, 22), 5.20pm (6.20pm), £11.00 - £15.00, fpp280. tw rating 4/5 [vk]

The Mourning Party

Up In The Gods

Where were you when President Kennedy died? Not even born yet if you're the cast of 'The Mourning Party', but that doesn't stop them turning in excellent performances as three strangers unite in an Indiana bar by the news of his assassination. The play begins with three beautifully observed overlapping monologues that introduce the characters, but once they've heard the news, we get too many vague generalisations about what Jack Kennedy meant to them and not enough about the characters themselves. The point is presumably the contrast between their frustrated lives and the hope Kennedy represented, but I wish a little less had been made of this central conceit. Nevertheless, this talented cast and writer are clearly going places.

C soco, 14 - 29 Aug, 4.45pm (5.45pm), £6.50 - £9.50, fpp282. tw rating 3/5 [nw]

Naïve Dance Masterclass

Inconvenient Spoof

Less of a dance masterclass and more like watching 'Dirty Dancing' on acid whilst the world slowly implodes, an ex-contemporary dance star tells his tale of how he went from dancing to riot-policing and falling in love with an illegal street dancer. Represented for the most part by a toy doll jiggling a hula hoop, his love runs away with his rabbit friend Tony. If this all makes perfect sense, then first of all check the sell-by-date on the pills you're taking, then head on down to this show. At times it's hilariously surreal and at others just plain bemusing, but if you've a passion for the absurd, then this show is definitely for you.

C eca, 14 - 29 Aug, 6.50pm (7.40pm), £7.50 - £10.50, fpp283. tw rating 3/5 [jc]

Trog And Clay (An Imagined History Of The Electric Chair)

Red Tie Productions (LA)

The story of Thomas Edison, George Westinghouse, and the development of the electric chair isn't widely known outside of the United States. The two men competed over who would supply electricity to the US and electric execution was the by-product. This company takes the tale and turns it into a satirical tragicomedy about the feud between the two men. While by no means historically accurate, failing entirely to mention Nikola Tesla, the crux of the story is all there. Trog and Clay emerge as fictional catalysts for the first electric execution, and all members of the cast perform with the utmost professionalism. And although it isn't as funny as perhaps intended, it is nonetheless engaging.

C eca, 14 - 29 Aug, 5.25pm (6.35pm), £7.50 - £10.50, fpp306. tw rating 3/5 [tw]

How Steeple Sinderby Wanderers Won The FA Cup

New Perspectives Theatre Company

Humility and community are the themes laid out by director Paul Hodson in this story of how a small village football team triumphed in the FA Cup. Fictionalising certain historical elements, the play sees actor Mark Jardine provide nostalgic voices and characters from the initial entry in the tournament, to the team's ultimate victory. The show's grace lies in the writing, which is penned with passion and edge. Jardine manages to take us back to the early 20th Century with his grandfatherly style of narration, dropping vignettes about the team's players as he goes. He successfully builds a little world in itself which, for a short period of time, was simply the biggest stage in football.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, 3 - 28 Aug (not 16), 1.15pm (2.30pm), £8.00 - £10.00, fpp269. tw rating 4/5 [ajj]

Ophelia

RSH Productions

This show sells itself as a retelling of Shakepeare's 'Hamlet' with Ophelia taking centre stage. And although the concept is interesting and displays potential, the play seems to be lacking a certain something. The lines of the original play are used and abused in a rather sporadic manner, making them and the play as a whole lose meaning; they would most definitely be lost on those unfamiliar with the basic story of Hamlet. It is rescued, however, by strong performances from the small cast, especially by Kate Young as the feisty Ophelia. Perhaps worth seeing for ardent fans of the bard, but for most, unfortunately, I suspect this reworking of Hamlet is "not to be".

theSpaces On The Mile, Aug 15 – 27 (not 21), 5.00pm (5.55pm), £4.00 - £8.00, fpp286. tw rating 3/5 [st]

Pushing Up Poppies

Poppy Productions

It's almost impossible to convey on stage the terror and tedium that a soldier experiences waiting for battle, but Poppy Productions have attempted it nonetheless. The result is an odd mix of absurdist black comedy and escalating angst in an existentialist sitcom following four young Tommies going stir-crazy in a World War I trench. Delivered in tones of heightened whining or flippancy, the intentionally banal dialogue runs through every cliché, knowingly repeating familiar scenes of the 'what I miss most' mould. Though occasionally drifting into some surprising dark humour, the structure is so fractured that it's hard to feel invested. While this trivial approach avoids trivialising the horrors of history, it doesn't do them justice, either.

Hill Street Theatre, 5 – 29 Aug, 7.15 pm (8.20 pm), £8.00 – £10.00, fpp290. tw rating 2/5 [df]



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TW RATINGS EXPLAINED: 1/5 BAD | 2/5 MEDIOCRE | 3/5 GOOD | 4/5 VERY GOOD | 5/5 BRILLIANT