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PAUL McCAFFREY SAYING SOMETHING STUPID



0844 545 8252 | 6.20PM (7.20PM)
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jason john whitehead letters from mindy



0844 545 8252 | 22.25PM (23.25PM)
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15th - 27th Aug excl. 21st | 18:30 - 19:30 £6/5

The Melody Blog a modern musical



FRINGE REVIEW

CABARET

Dusty Limits – Darkling

Terry Finnegan presents Dusty Limits – Darkling

Dusty Limits, the pale-faced, gin and tonic sipping, lipstick-wearing misanthrope takes his willing audience into the dark world of melancholy and depression. According to Dusty, there's far too much comedy in the world. Just one look at Michael McIntyre's chubby, grinning little face fills him with despair. Having said that, this devilish little cabaret is itself wickedly funny. Dusty delivers a selection of delicious musical morsels: a mixture of biting satirical numbers and ballads of utter misery. Dusty warns, as he begins the 'The Hungarian Suicide song' that this one has actually driven people to the grave. He hopes it doesn't affect any of his audience (but he wouldn't mind the publicity.) The perfect antithesis to Edinburgh's 'comedy' obsession.

SpaceCabaret @ 54, Aug 21 – 27, 6.05 pm (6.50pm), £11.00 - £14.00, fpp10 tw rating 4/5 [ch]

CHILDREN'S SHOWS

Peter Pan on Dinosaur Island

Spillites Theatre Productions

This is exactly what every show for kids should be like. Each child gets the opportunity to participate on stage and they are kept thoroughly entertained and active. The clever storyline puts a modern twist on the classic tale of Peter Pan as we see him trying to save the dinosaurs from the evil Captain Hook. In the words of my six year old sister as she came bounding out of the show: "I loved that, it was amazing... did you see the T-Rex? Can we go back again?" Considering that the show was quite long, all the kids seemed to enjoy it throughout so they must be doing something right. I would definitely recommend take your kids along to see this.

Spillites @ The Merchants' Hall, 2-21, 27-28 Aug, 1.30pm (3.15pm), £5.50 - £22.00, fpp27 tw rating 5/5 [nc]

Just So Stories

Red Table Theatre

The secret to producing something for children - which animation studios Pixar discovered a long time ago - is that it has to also appeal to the adults, something that the cast of this delightful production know all too well. The kids get comfy bean bags and cuddly animals by the front, which is a lovely touch to bring them into the world of storytelling. We hear, amongst others, the tale of how the elephant got its trunk, and how the camel got its hump, with amusing props and fun songs that bring the stories to life in a childlike fashion that appeals as much to the nostalgic adults as to the enthralled kids. A real treat for young and old alike.

Pleasance Courtyard, 3 – 29 Aug (not 10, 22), times vary, £7.00 - £9.00, fpp24, tw rating 5/5 [ljc]

COMEDY

Chris Cox: Fatal Distraction

Phil McIntyre Entertainments

Chris Cox's extraordinary mind-reading display forced me to reconsider my review star-rating policy, as five stars seem almost too miserly for this show. An endearing boy-next-door version of the unnervingly sinister Derren Brown, Cox had dozens of baffling tricks up his sleeve during this performance, and it couldn't have been coincidental when each one was executed to perfection. Long before the stunning grand finale, his illusions were so consistently astounding that the magical and remarkable became commonplace and customary. For example, shortly after revealing the mobile number of an unsuspecting audience member, Cox demonstrated that he had memorised seemingly every detail in this year's colossal Fringe programme. 'Fatal Distraction' is listed on page 57 – book your ticket immediately.

Pleasance Dome, 3 – 29 Aug (not 16), 7.10pm (8.10pm), £10.50 - £14.00, fpp57, tw rating: 5/5 [jf]

Daniel Sloss: The Joker

MZA And Get Slossed Productions

As soon as Daniel Sloss asks the show's sign language interpreter to sign the word 'twat', it becomes clear that this won't be an evening of highbrow comedy. The fresh-faced 20 year old commands the crowded tent with unexpected confidence, and it's soon apparent that Frankie Boyle's protégé has been doing this for a while. However, for all that his posters seductively promise about his numerous TV appearances, Sloss's routine comes as a bit of a disappointment. He's got a several good gags including ones about his 'prick' hair and the natural "snog, marry, avoid" order of relationships, but too much of his material revolves around his age. He's certainly a bit of a joker but don't expect much more.

Assembly George Square, 3 – 29 Aug (not 4, 5, 16), 7.35pm (8.35pm), £10.00 - £13.50, fpp62, tw rating 3/5 [fm]

Horse And Louis: Tom Trumpin'! – Free

Horse And Louis / Laughing Horse Free Festival

After five minutes listening to Horse And Louis, your immediate reaction is to think of Flight Of The Conchords. The duo's mix of comedy music and slightly off the wall gags are very reminiscent of the Kiwi pair's stylings. However, Horse And Louis have a style of their own, using audience participation to determine the "Top Trump" of all the spectators. The pair have good stage presence and the songs are well written although at times they can trail off without a satisfactory finish. At points some of their short sketches are more innovative than the musical comedy they rely on, but they are endearing and funny nonetheless, and well worth a look.

Laughing Horse @ Espionage, 5 - 28 Aug (not 13, 22), 2.45pm (3.45pm), free, fpp88, tw rating 3/5 [ec]



SNAP OF THE DAY: Don't pick a fight with this one of Ciarad Lloyd's many characters. She's a Comedy Award Newcomer nominee, don't you know? Photo: Mark Conway

Claudia O'Doherty – What Is Soil Erosion?

Gilded Balloon / Token Events

Are you a soil erosion enthusiast? Well, don't get too excited. "Let's get rill!" Claudia bellows at the audience as we are speedily guided through her 26-part documentary, bizarrely, Australian TV execs have yet failed to see its brilliance. Recalling 'Look Around You', O'Doherty's nonsensical science demonstrations include using rocks as puppets, disintegrating a pudding, and downing pints of a mysterious black fluid. Our stained turtleneck wearing host is manically enthusiastic, verging on mentally unstable, but an instantly likeable creation who confidently cruises through her own unique brand of comedy. We may learn absolutely nothing about the erosion of soil, but Claudia O'Doherty does a fantastic job of making us giggle.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, 3 – 28 Aug (not 16), 8.45pm (9.45pm), £8.00 - £10.00, fpp58, tw rating 4/5 [fm]

Kai Humphries – Bare-Faced Cheek

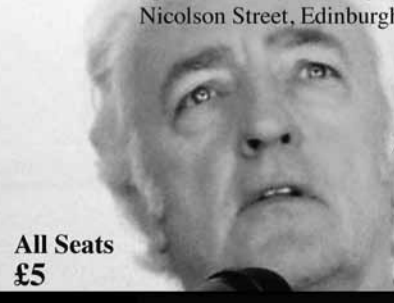
MZA And Punchdrunk

Kai Humphries is a lovely Geordie comic and this set wasn't just funny, it was like being cuddled for an hour, bathed in his sunny friendliness and impossible likeability that makes his rude humour feel mischievous and thoroughly inoffensive. His humour is unpretentious and charming, and makes you feel like you're having a hilarious night with your mates in the pub. Watch in awe and wonder, as Kai demonstrates his Rubix cube solving skills, his excellent repertoire of granddad jokes and how to battle rap your way out of anything – see it's also an educational show! Humphries makes for some totally childish, good (if not quite clean), cheeky fun.

Underbelly's Pasture, 3 - 29 Aug (not 17), 22.30pm (23.30 pm), £8.50 - £10.50, fpp103, tw rating 4/5 [ld]

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Lorcan McGrath Is... Not In Love – Free

Lorcan McGrath / Laughing Horse Free Fringe

I am the only audience member for Lorcan McGrath's set and, to his credit, he manages to make me smile, chuckle and even laugh out loud with a charmingly amiable routine. True, some confessions are a little too intimate for an audience of one and he needs polish, but overall his musings on love are entertaining and the section with his alternate self is hilariously funny. He won't blow your mind or reshape your idea of comedy, but McGrath is a kindly soul and his set is pleasant and upbeat, despite his not being "in love". The free biscuits are a welcome treat too! McGrath deserves to play to a decent crowd, not just one reviewer.

Laughing Horse @ The Beehive Inn, 6 – 27 Aug (not 18), 3.00pm (4.00pm), free, fpp110. tw rating 3/5 [ab]

Neil Hamburger: Discounted Entertainer

Assembly And Soho Theatre

Have you ever laughed mischievously at an inappropriate group text message following a celebrity death or tabloid scandal? If you have, you will adore 60 minutes in the company of Neil Hamburger, a man who drips sardonic disdain from every orifice. Wearing enough hair gel on his deliberately appalling side-parting to set himself alight, Hamburger recites dozens of vulgar jokes about derided figures in American pop culture, including Charlie Sheen, Paris Hilton and Michael Jackson. His material is frequently outdated, concerning long disbanded rock groups, but his shamolic appearance and self-lacerating personality are so hilarious that a lack of topicality never seems to matter. Listen out for his gag about Britney Spears.

Assembly George Square, 15 – 28 Aug, 10.40pm (11.40pm), £11.00 - £12.00, fpp125. tw rating: 4/5 [jf]

Tom Goodliffe: The Good Liffe

Tom Goodliffe

You'll struggle to find better value for money than this wonderfully upbeat hour of stand-up from self-proclaimed nerd and all-round nice guy, Tom Goodliffe. He starts off by helping people find seats in the cramped venue – audience endeared? Check. He then goes on to deliver a set which ultimately tells the story of how he ended up there in front of you. It's perhaps a touch on the light side, with material that doesn't stray far from the conventional, but it's delivered with a charming, intelligent wit that always evokes laughs – even when some of his gags sail over some people's heads. Still, there are enough broad laughs to make this one of the best fivers you could spend this Fringe.

Cabaret Voltaire, 4 – 29 Aug (not 15), 3.45pm (4.45pm), £5.00, fpp160. tw rating 4/5 [rss]

Susan Murray's Photo Booth

Susan Murray / The Stand Comedy Club

Finally, here is an observational comic who attaches their craft to a sturdy vehicle. Using the strong conceit of a collector of photo booth photography, Murray comes up with charming diversions that are both funny and fascinating. We've all got a collecting habit, whether it be something as dedicated as stamps and autographs or something more low key like the ticket stubs from films; Murray taps into this object based memory reference habit and hooks her audience. Leading us through her life by the different hairstyles she had in photos, the different friends, boyfriends, or random people she has is fascinating. At times touching, but most of the time humorous, this is a definite show to see if you enjoy observational comedy.

The Stand Comedy Club III & IV, 4 – 28 Aug (not 15), 5.55pm (6.55pm), £7.00 - £8.00, fpp156. tw rating 4/5 [fjb]

The Silky Pair: Jealous People – Free

Silky Pair / Laughing Horse Free Festival

Even attempting rapid fire, quick change sketch comedy in the tiny confines of this performance space is laudable; that the Silky Pair largely pull it off is all the more impressive. Opening with an operatic number that shows off two good voices, the Silky Pair stick to a fairly safe set of middle class characters. Spoofs of history documentaries, property and cookery shows are funny, but nothing you don't see on a regular basis, and whilst the musical numbers and running jokes are good, they tend to overstay their welcome. Not quite uproariously funny, Bond and Shaw nonetheless produce a slick, amusing show that is a refreshing free fringe change from one bearded bloke whining about not getting any sex.

Laughing Horse @ Espionage, 4 – 28 Aug, 6.30pm (7.30pm), free, fpp151. tw rating 3/5 [ab]

Wet Paint: A Magic Show – Free

Ben Hart And Neil Kelso / PBH's Free Fringe

"We don't prepare the show," Ben Hart tells us. "It's different every day." This, perhaps, is a mistake as magic requires slickness in execution and 'Wet Paint' isn't quite sharp enough. Neil Kelso and Ben Hart are an endearing team and some of their tricks are good - the synchronised card trick is both novel and impressive - but other sleights and forces are too obvious and their presentation too haphazard. Old school illusions, like the linking rings, are performed well, but fail to dazzle a modern audience. Likewise, Hart's mind reading should have gone down better, but a weak reveal blew the moment. With more stagecraft and less improvisation they could be great, rather than just okay.

The Voodoo Rooms, 5 - 29 Aug, 12.30pm (1.30pm), free, fpp16. tw rating 2/5 [ab]

Catherine Semark: The Truth About Lions

Catherine Semark/PBH's Free Fringe

In lieu of a dissection of the BBC2 series of the same name, Catherine Semark opts to challenge our ideas of expectations. Going through a series of anecdotes and observations, Semark is an endearing character who engages with her audience to great effect. She discusses things that don't quite live up to her expectations, such as her childhood belief that old women grant wishes, to things that just might be exactly what you think – like a discarded porn magazine found next to a watermelon in a wood. Semark's show is well-structured and carried off with charisma, though at times the material doesn't quite hit the mark. It is nonetheless a nice way to spend an afternoon.

Medina, 6-28 Aug (not 10, 17), 2.35pm (3.25pm), free, fpp56. tw rating 3/5 [ec]

THEATRE

Ethometric Museum Ray Lee

'Ethometric Museum' is rather a unique experience, and is by turns beautiful, eerie and downright disturbing – at one point, I got so paranoid I convinced myself everyone else in the audience was a plant. It is hard to believe that this effect is entirely due to the weird, atmospheric, startling soundscapes Ray Lee coaxes from his selection of intricately-crafted instruments. Housed in a dark, dank New Town basement, the 'Ethometric Museum' archives instruments from an abandoned branch of science—all of which are wonderful, creepy-looking amalgamations of wood and metal, like the missing link between gramophones and Frankenstein — and "demonstrated" by Lee. It's not for everyone, but if you're after

something genuinely different, 'Ethometric Museum' will take your breath away.

Hill Street Theatre, 19 – 28 Aug, times vary, £7.00 - £9.00, fpp260. tw rating 4/5 [eb]

Grisly Tales From Tumblewater

Teasel Theatre

Not unlike another city you might know, it always rains in Tumblewater. Based on Bruno Vincent's novel, 'Grisly Tales From Tumblewater' is an enchanting fairytale vividly brought to life by Edward Jaspers. Replete with satchel, top-hat and easy-going charm, Jaspers takes us on an hour-long, fantastical romp through the wettest place in the world. Tumblewater is peopled with a series of weird and wonderful individuals – from the narrator, orphan and would-be doctor Daniel Dory, to the sinister Caspian Prye, who "was a good man, once" before heartbreak turned him into something "not even human" – and Jaspers is on brilliant form as he skips from character to character. Witty, musical and magical, 'Grisly Tales From Tumblewater' is a fabulous adaptation.

Pleasance Courtyard, 3 – 29 Aug (not 16), 2.00pm (3.00pm), £6.50 - £9.00, fpp267. tw rating 5/5 [eb]

Me, Myself And Miss Gibbs

Francesca Millican-Slater

As the audience is taking their seats, Francesca is already on the stage, welcoming everyone individually to her show. This sets the tone, as she takes the audience through the story of how she attempted to track down the recipient of a 100 year old postcard found in a second hand shop bearing the cryptic message "Be careful tomorrow". She's very likeable, and at times this is less like a piece of theatre and more like going round to a friend's house for a chat. Her story, punctuated by photos and videos of herself eight years ago, is fascinating, as she details her investigations of the mysterious Miss Gibbs. This is, all in all, a very enjoyable start to the afternoon.

Hill Street Theatre, 19 - 29 Aug, 12.15pm (1.15pm), £6.00 - £8.00, fpp280. tw rating 4/5 [im]

One Million Tiny Plays About Britain

RT Productions In Association With Citizens Theatre

Inspired by Craig Taylor's overheard conversations, local council banter and drunken nights out create this sharp montage of little vignettes from all over Britain. The coastlines of England and the rough streets of Glasgow stand back to back as 'Tiny Plays' looks at the small details which characterise the nation, from the subject of binge drinking Geordies to that of divided political opinion. Hosted on the first floor of The White Company, turfed park areas and scattered sets fuse and mingle to build several tiny stages; yet while this is an ingenious feature of the show's arrangement, it is also its downfall as some skits are hilariously observant, while others are slightly dull. But comic and astute throughout, this is a delightfully inventive production.

Hill Street Theatre, 5 – 28 Aug (not 9, 16, 23), times vary, £9.50 - £15.00, fpp286. tw rating 4/5 [ajj]

The Wright Brothers Oxford Playhouse

Following the story of Wilbur and Orville Wright, who made the first breakthrough into solving how man could snap the shackles of his own genetics and fly, 'The Wright Brothers' perfectly captures the spirit of a time when exciting discoveries were just around the corner. It's difficult to do justice to such an important moment in history however, and the play falls short of making this into as cinematic a tale as it could have been. There are fleeting moments of touching tranquillity, as

Orville sits in dimmed lighting in front of a projection of a sunset, quietly reflecting, and if only the excitement in other scenes balanced this out emotionally, then this could have been a soaring success.

Pleasance Courtyard, 5 – 27 Aug (not 18, 15, 21), 1.30pm (2.30pm), £9.00 - £11.00, fpp313. tw rating 3/5 [ljc]

Tomboy Blues: The Theory Of Disappointment Mars.tarrab

Disappointment may be a part of life but 'Tomboy Blues' is far from it. Performed by the writers, this contemporary theatrical piece presents experiences of hope and disappointment in life and love. This thought-provoking presentation moves seamlessly through scenes of interpretative dance, dialogue and storytelling. Costumes and props are used successfully to dramatise the emotional ups and downs of relationships while searching for personal identity, and the cast's performances are particularly powerful. The direction pays great attention to detail, but at times the art can cloud the message. Despite this, it is the wonderfully flowing speeches and moving confessions that communicate real feelings of self discovery. A passionate performance of real, honest writing.

Zoo Southside, 14 - 28 Aug, 6.30pm (7.30pm), £5.00 - £8.00, fpp305. tw rating 4/5 [ep]

Abi Patrix And Linda Edsjo: A Concert Of Stories

La Compagnie du Cercle (France)

Step into the theatre and enter a world of love, life and marbles. 'A Concert of Stories' is exactly as described: a collection of fairytale-style fables with [very loud] marimba and drum accompaniment. The show is executed with verve and enthusiasm, and Patrix is a commanding narrator, with Edsjo providing accompaniment and back-up characters. And yet, despite the fantastical words and their obvious skill, I rarely found myself immersed in the experience. The stories were conveniently twee, the music more often jarring than supportive. The rest of the audience appeared spellbound: I frequently found myself staring at my shoes, counting down the minutes. A talented piece, but suitable only for those with a high tolerance of Gallic whimsy.

Scottish Storytelling Centre, 13 - 28 Aug (not 22), 7.00pm (8.15pm), £6.00 - £8.00, fpp236. tw rating 2/5 [kw]

After Miss Julie Staveley Roundhouse

You'd think a play with this much seduction, sadomasochism and class-conflict would be more interesting, but it falls strangely flat. It's 1945 and the night of the landslide Labour victory. Seemingly, change is in the air for the relationship between the aristocracy and the working-classes, but 'After Miss Julie' questions whether things can really change as Miss Julie and her chauffeur, John, struggle for power. So far, so interesting. The problem is that the actors here don't make the characters charming enough to care about, and their constantly changing power roles seem senseless instead of indicative of any societal problems. Overall, it's a perfectly competent production, but it doesn't seem to add up to anything meaningful.

theSpaces @ Surgeons Hall, 15 – 20 Aug, 11.40am (12.50pm), £5.00 - £7.50, fpp236. tw rating 2/5 [krm]

The Dark Philosophers

National Theatre Wales / Told By An Idiot

"Let me explain – I'm dead." In this mystifying performance, that wasn't the only thing that needed clarification. Fragmented narratives were intricately woven together into captivating, somewhat cohesive theatre by a deceased yet ever-present masked figure. The events, for the most part, followed a patchwork trail along the lifeline of

Gwyn Thomas, a novelist once termed "the true voice of the English-speaking valleys". The set was ingeniously conceived, with wardrobes serving as portals between other characters' stories as well as across time. Though this did mean that occasionally the multiplicity of narratives proved a little hard to follow, the narrative flung itself back and forth, shifting focus between Thomas and the parallel (equally scintillating) stories immersed in Brimstone Terrace. Bewitching.

Traverse Theatre, 9 – 28 Aug (not 15, 22), times vary, £6.00 - £19.00, fpp253. tw rating 4/5 [jlb]

Excess Baggage Rebel Base Productions

Mixing culture-clash character-comedy and farce, 'Excess Baggage' introduces us to newly-weds Jack and Kristy, who have somehow ended up minding a bag for an old man. From this simple premise, this punchy, neat little play extracts plenty of laughs from both the characters' reactions to their situation and their lives generally. The sharp, well-timed dialogue is delivered with outright conviction by the four-person cast, while the two lead characters feel well-developed despite the short running-time. For my taste, the bitter-sweet character comedy and its downer ending didn't quite fit with the farcical elements, but both were excellent regardless. 'Excess Baggage' is a tremendously funny, clever little play that doesn't outstay its welcome, unlike the bag.

theSpaces @ Surgeon's Hall, 5 – 20 Aug (not 7, 14), 5.10pm (5.55pm), £6.00 - £8.00, fpp260. tw rating 4/5 [ab]

The Dick And The Rose

Outcast Café Theatrx

"It's a wonder we survive." So runs the appropriate refrain in this eyebrow-raising, all-American show featuring screeching hand puppets, folk music, and a glib compère. The play opens with Circus Girl's joyful seduction of Sleeper, yet the lovers become miserable when they find themselves responsible for a hoard of demanding children (puppets). When the overwhelmed Sleeper abandons the family home, a crazed Circus Girl disposes of the brats. There are funny moments, and an impressive array of musical instruments are featured; however, the play has the lurid aspect of a depressing theme – the cycle of life which impels one to parentage and then death – treated in a crass, mocking style. Physical theatre at its gaudiest.

Gryphon Venues at the Point Hotel, 5 - 27 Aug (not 14, 21), 1.30pm (2.20pm), £6.00 - £8.00, fpp256. tw rating 2/5 [lk]

The Extraordinary Revelations of Orca The Goldfish

Upstage Theatre Company

The characters in this play are boring – that's not my opinion, it's theirs. Henry and Alice are trapped in a boring marriage, and they survive by escaping into a fantasy world, imagining themselves as actors, or spies, or glamorous socialites at a sexy party. The play wants to be 'Billy Liar', contrasting the humdrum reality of their daily lives with the exciting world of their imaginations. Unfortunately, their daily lives aren't very realistic and their imaginations aren't very imaginative: in both, the play relies on crudely drawn stereotypes which quickly lose their appeal. Thankfully, the two actors are immensely likeable, and throw themselves into their parts, holding our attention for longer than the sub-par material probably deserves.

theSpaces on the Mile, 5 - 27 Aug, times vary, £5.50 - £7.00, fpp260. tw rating 2/5 [nw]

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