

ThreeWeeks EDINBURGH



COMEDY

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Jools Constant/PBH's Free Fringe

Ever wondered if live online interaction could form the basis of a comedy show? Comedian Jools Constant did, and the result is this experimental multimedia show, involving audience participation with a twist. Spectators are asked to get their phones out, add Constant on Facebook and then post photos, comments and heckles on his profile. These are projected live onto an on-stage screen and provide the basis for jokes and banter with the audience. The concept is intriguing and could potentially work extremely well, with a unique atmosphere being generated each day. However, success depends on the compliance of a witty audience: don't waste everyone's time by coming up with rude or unfunny suggestions!

The Cabaret Voltaire, 4-25 Aug, 6.20pm.
tw rating 3/5 | [Emily Pulsford]

Adam Hills: Mess Around

Off The Kerb Productions / Lisa Richards Agency

Adam Hills is impossibly likeable; he emits positivity. He tells the audience that he wants to talk to them rather than deliver a stand-up routine because he believes that anybody can be funny. This is where he and I disagree. Anybody can be not funny, no matter how funny the comedian they're talking to is. The highlight of the show was when he told a story about meeting the queen: it was genuinely funny. However the banter between Adam and the audience felt strained and, although it was funny at times, it was often awkward. I'm more interested in watching him be funny (which he genuinely is) than watching him try to eke comedy out of unwilling audience members.

Assembly Hall, 4-19 Aug, times vary.
tw rating 3/5 | [Olivia Lyth]

Amateur Transplants: Adam Kay's Bum Notes

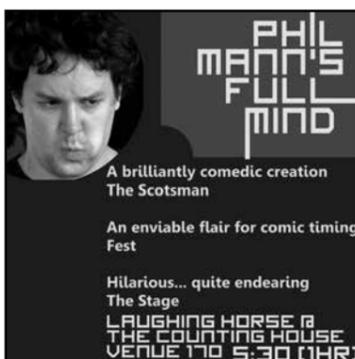
Bound and Gagged Comedy / Mandy Ward Artist Management

Anaesthetist-turned-comedian Adam Kay delivers an hour of first-class smutty jokes - on the piano! The Amateur Transplants frontman is a comedy veteran whose awkwardly hilarious stage presence makes for excellent x-rated stand-up, but the real highlights of the show are his songs. His dark parodies are unfailingly funny: you'll never be able to listen to the classics in the same way again. Seamlessly switching from mic to music, Kay performs a mixture of new tunes and old favourite hits and even manages to get the audience singing along. Fast-paced, filthy and incredibly funny, you couldn't ask for more from the Fringe. But definitely don't go with your parents.

Pleasance Courtyard, 5-27 Aug, 7.00pm.
tw rating 5/5 | [pallavi patel]



SNAP OF THE DAY: The Edinburgh International Festival gets properly underway tonight with an Opening Concert featuring soprano Anna Christy, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and the Edinburgh Festival Chorus. Photo: Paul Collins



The St Andrews Revue

St Andrews Revue

The St Andrews Revue take an always-fresh approach to some overdone subjects. Though the zeitgeisty topics they use have been well covered by more mainstream comics, their jokes about last year's royal wedding, social networking and the inevitable 'Fifty Shades Of Grey' reference were both funnier and cleverer than many. Naturally, not all of the sketches were perfect and a couple trailed off at the end, but there is obviously a lot of talent and intelligence going into the making of this show. Even when the troupe move away from up-to-the-minute pop culture references, they maintain their high standard, and some of the ideas are sparkling.

Just The Tonic At The Caves, 2-19 Aug (not 14), 12.40pm.
tw rating 4/5 | [Roz Tuplin]

Bad Advice - Free

Lauren Shearing and Sarah Pearce

After battling the labyrinth of stairways and corridors on your adventure into the depths of Espionage, you may come across some comedy. Every evening at 10 you'll discover two of the festival's newest comics and their show, Bad Advice - Free. Lauren Shearing and Sarah Pearce give it an enthusiastic and happy try, and it's not so bad, as debuts go. Gentle heckling and a tangible ability to encourage audience

participation did win some people over, but with only intermittent laughter at the occasional crude joke this feels more like an act by two Butlins Reps than a performance at the world's largest comedy festival. However, with a more polished routine and slightly less giggling the girls could definitely start considering next year's show.

Espionage - Mata Hari, 5-26 Aug, 10.00pm
tw rating 2/5 | [James Valentine]

Him And Me: Sketch Circus - Free

Him And Me

I should have hated this show; it had all the sophistication and subtlety of a stag night during Blackpool illuminations. However, despite its bawdy flamboyance, it was also rather brilliant. The dynamic duo were clearly the best of friends, and it was difficult not to be swept along by their enthusiasm and rapport. Lines were forgotten, sketches were under-rehearsed, and punchlines were fairly predictable, but none of that really mattered. Their improvised teasing when things went awry was often funnier than their pre-written material. If you have a spare hour, a puerile sense of humour, and a few quid for a round of drinks beforehand, shut off your brain for a while and have a mischievous snigger at this show.

Laughing Horse @ City Café, 2 - 25 Aug, 8.00pm.
tw rating: 3/5 | [Joseph Fleming]

Thomas Nelstrop: Great(ish) Hits

Ditto Productions by Arrangement With JBJ Management

With a slick and clever parody of pop culture based at a fictitious festival the likes of which Glastonbury could only wish to aspire to, Thomas Nelstrop is definitely making his mark with his debut Edinburgh fringe show. This well developed character entertains the audience with greatly skilled impressions (his Jools Holland is particularly hilarious), and fantastically witty songs mocking the styles of many well-known artists, a personal favourite being Jimmi Hendrix "before he could play guitar"... I so often find this type of show fails to hit the spot, but Thomas Nelstrop clearly demonstrates a flair for comedic performing which he pulls off with enviable panache. A headliner of a show. Rock On Thom.

Pleasance Courtyard, 1-27 Aug (not 14), 4.30pm.
tw rating 4/5 | [Simon Thornton]

The Thinking Drinkers Guide To Alcohol

Tom Sandham and Ben McFarland/The Assembly Rooms

Drink less but drink better is the motto of this charming twosome, as they lead us through the sozzled history of the world. Beginning with the Sumerians and progressing to the modern day, they mix interesting factoids with cont>

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cont> jokes a plenty, shaken up with some rather dashing costume changes. The audience participation is snappy and not laboured, creating hilarity without engendering constant fear in the audience, perhaps even provoking a little jealousy, as prizes are awarded to those who brave the stage. At times the show's ambitious scope means it doesn't run quite as smoothly as one might hope, but this is overridden by the audience's burgeoning love for the duo, which is only partially related to the six free drinks distributed throughout the show.

The Assembly Rooms, 2-26 Aug (not 13), times vary.

tw rating 4/5 | [Jessamine McHugh]

The Three Half Pints

Everything goes wrong in the eccentrically posh world of The Three Half Pints! Gleeefully silly and full of surprises, the show sees three brothers - Ernie, Derrick and Dick - present a range of sharply witty and "weally, weally good" sketches. Using gentlemanly banter and embracing the use of shockingly convincing, yet delightfully hilarious, moments of stage combat - The Three Half Pints dazzle with well executed 'Monty Python'-esque slapstick humour. Richard Frank's adorably dim portrayal of Dick induces belly aching laughs and is reminiscent of the dim witted 'Frank Spencer' from 'Some Mothers Do 'Ave 'Em'. This free show is sure to captivate you, and it is refreshing to see such brilliant and young talent in the festival.

Laughing Horse @ Edinburgh City Football Club, 2-7, 9-21, 23-26 Aug, 1.05pm

tw rating 5/5. | [Kristine Gallagher]

This Barry Ferns Belongs To Lionel Richie

This Belongs To Lionel Richie

A patchwork of stand-up, sketches and publicity stunts, this performance was tied together by the thread of Edinburghs gone by. It worked largely as a retrospective of Barry's (technically Lionel's...) decade-long Fringe tenure, during which he fantasised about an Edinburgh ombudsman telling him objectively whether his productions were worth the hassle (and the bankruptcy). It did stray into the realm of farce many times (purposefully or not), yet ultimately the hitches became the highlights, not a reflection on the script but on Ferns (Richie) himself who handled them impeccably. While Barry's (Lionel's) doubts about the Fringe were prescient, if I could step into his imaginary official's shoes just for a second, I'd assure him he wasn't wasting his time.

The Hive, 2-27 Aug (not 15), 4.00pm.

tw rating 3/5 | [Rachel Aroesti]

DANCE & PHYSICAL THEATRE

Mother Africa

After a slight technical hitch and an intro from an MC who preaches about what makes a good live audience, Mother Africa, a circus spectacular who have been touring the world since 2006, take over the Assembly Hall. This all singing, all dancing (tap, gumboot with a spot of juggling and acrobatics thrown in) troupe set the room ablaze with their tremendous strength, stamina and showmanship. The live band are a constant driving force that hold the stand-alone acts together and make for a slick, robust performance. From pulsating rhythms and vibrant energy to more mellow numbers with some gorgeous harmony arrangements, this show has something for everyone, all members of the family indeed.

Assembly Hall, 2-27 Aug (not 13, 20), 2.20pm. tw rating 3/5 | [Lucinda Al-Zoghbi]

Rhythmic Circus – Feet Don’t Fail Me Now!

Rhythmic Circus

Energy comes off this vibrant routine from 'Rhythmic Circus' in palpable waves; this dance and orchestral ensemble from Minnesota has captured something primal about music, and 'Feet Don't Fail Me Now!' is a tremendous performance that mixes funk, blues, tap, beat-box and a cappella

into a storm of feverish excitement. Crackling with enthusiasm from start to finish, the set is varied, imaginative, and playful. The whole cast seem to be having the time of their lives, and the sheer vitality contained in this performance makes for a unifying experience. In the latter half of the show, a comparison made between the beat and a living pulse sums up their attitude to music and movement - that it is instinctive, constant, and essential.

Assembly George Square, 1-27 Aug (not 13, 20), 3.40pm.

tw rating 5/5 | [Colette M Talbot]

MUSIC

Anda Union – The Wind Horse Anda Union

Greeted by a pleasant fellow in traditional Mongolian dress, I'm handed a blue scarf to drape around my neck, and confusedly oblige. Entering the venue I'm confronted by a sea of blue-scarved spectators, and have a sudden feeling of being part of something special.

Over the next hour, we, the Blue Scarves, are treated to an eclectic mix of Mongolian music, some lullaby-like, some up-tempo, all hypnotic. Every musician introduces their own favourite melody, each song telling a story - from mountain narratives, to tales of beautiful girls, passed down through generations. A wonderful array of voices serenades us, each a unique, finely tuned instrument. We leave with smiles and souvenirs (our blue scarves!) as a memento from our special afternoon.

Assembly George Square, 2-27 Aug, 3.30pm tw rating 4/5 | [Christy Brown]

The 27 Club Forever 27 Productions

There is nothing you can do to stop yourself toe-tapping your way through this show. The infamous 27 club - the group of musicians who have passed away aged 27 - is said to include some of the world's greatest rock stars, from the likes of Jimi Hendrix and Kurt Cobain to the more recently deceased Amy Winehouse. We are quickly and effectively drawn into their world, and made to consider the question of whether this really is a curse, or if it's purely coincidence that these people never saw the age of 28. The key is in the great performances; not only can the actors sing, but they demonstrate similar stage presence to that of the greats whose work they are evoking.

Assembly George Square, 5-27 Aug (not 20), 6.00pm

tw rating 5/5 | [Rachel Campbell]

Les Clochards: Dirty But Nice The Les Clochards

Five Corsican tramps take the stage in slapdash fashion; many an audience eyebrow is raised. In the split second before a single line is performed, one can sense one universal thought - "So crazy it might work?" - reverberating through the crowd, tenterhooks keeping bums in seats. Les Clochards are certainly insane, but also prove to be hugely charismatic, side-splittingly hilarious, and cheeky enough to draw a few blushes from their rapidly devoted spectators. Well-known classics, including eighties throwbacks the boys teasingly claim were stolen from their repertoire, are reworked and infused with some Les Clochards magic; Madonna's 'Like A Virgin' transformed into a ballad and dedicated to the female audience contingent. Ah, and speaking of thrills for the girls: Ladies, stick around for the encore.

Assembly George Square, 2-27 Aug (not 13, 20), 7.30pm.

tw rating 5/5 | [Christy Brown]

MUSICALS & OPERA

Wild West End

Paulden Hall Productions

The greatest thing about 'Wild West End' is that it parodies aspects of almost every well-known musical, and yet is totally and wittily self-deprecating, aware that the storyline is very patchy, and making a joke

of it. A collection of well-sung hits with original lyrics, the story follows Jackie, a rather effeminate young man who tries to write a musical, encountering the help of renowned characters not quite as we know them, like the Lizard of Oz, a very camp Phantom of the Opera, and a rather sexualised Dorothy. A perfect mix of energetic, audacious and absurd, it is the infectious enthusiasm and utter nuttiness of the versatile cast which really brings the humour of this musical theatre satire to life.

Pleasance Dome, 4-27 Aug, 6.50pm.

tw rating 4/5 | [Grace Hardy]

THEATRE

DirtyBlood

Last Draft Theatre Company

'DirtyBlood' is Making A Point - gay people should be allowed to be blood donors - which is a shame, because when it's not Making A Point, 'Dirty Blood' is a delightful, funny little play about love, illness and family. The dialogue fairly zips along, sparkling and witty in that way that real people aren't. The skilful cast deliver their lines with excellent timing and imbue their characters with believable warmth. Then suddenly, we are Making A Point and it all goes momentarily wrong, the proselytising feeling forced and clumsy. 'DirtyBlood' is still a great piece of new theatre that's well worth seeing, it's just not as good as it could have been if it hadn't been Making A Point.

theSpace on North Bridge, 9 - 18 Aug (not 5, 12), 6.35pm.

tw rating 4/5 | [Andrew Bell]

Machinal

Oxford University Dramatic Society

'Machinal' will never be an easy play to produce. It requires strong performances in order to really make it zing, and unfortunately OUDS didn't quite manage to pull it off. The energy levels were certainly high, and the pacing is enjoyably fast, but sadly this kineticism at times leads to a loss of coherence. This isn't helped by the annoying factor of some of the cast aiming their lines towards the rear of the stage; last time I saw so much of the backs of actors' heads I was watching porn. While the acting was by no means bad, it also wasn't good enough to fully do the play justice, so I ultimately didn't really care about the characters, or what happened to them.

C nova, 3 - 26 Aug (not 13), 7.15pm

tw rating 2/5 | [Iain Martin]

Miss Havisham’s Expectations Seabright Productions and LMP

Linda Marlowe gives a perfect performance as one of Dickens' finest creations - the tragic Miss Havisham - in this spectacular production. Telling the tale of Great Expectations from her brilliantly satirical point of view, she brings the tale alive for a new audience, while conjuring tricks and the skilful use of media keep this production fresh and interesting. Marlowe skilfully holds the audience's attention in the palm of her hand throughout the whole play, especially in the scenes where the true dark potential of her character is really unleashed. Switching constantly between narrator and actor in her tale, without ever losing the believability of her role, Marlowe is eerily convincing as the jilted woman who never recovered. The most enjoyable adaptation of Dickens I've seen. Gilded Balloon Teviot, 1-27 Aug(not 8,15), 3.00pm. tw rating 5/5 | [charlotte ryan]

Mr Carmen

AKHE - Russian Engineering Theatre/Russian Season 2012

If watching two grown men roll around in a pool of strong smelling vinegar is your thing, you'll probably love this production, but for the rest of you, I guarantee a coughing fit. A silent show with a rather interesting stage set up, the play consisted of the hero and his alter-ego moving around to strange music and competing with each other to find the most ludicrous way to write 'Jose' and 'Carmen' on the stage (in whipped cream, in wine, on

their naked body parts...). For admirers of Merime's text or for the more arty and cultured types out there, this is probably a masterpiece, but for someone like me, it was simply disturbing. Still, quite unforgettable.

Assembly Roxy, 5-27 Aug (not 13, 20), 6.p.m.

tw rating 2/5 | [Lauren Houghton]

My Elevator Days Svenska Teatern

"It's nice if someone remembered if you once existed." This rings in the heart of each of us and is why this translation of this Finnish play makes an impact so simply and subtly. Alexander West's portrayal of this elderly man could have easily been over-acted, yet his performance was calm, quirky and, above all else, truly believable. Following how this lonely man finds company in anyone (and anything), the unpretentious qualities of this play's production and performance form an exemplary well-balanced tragicomedy. Not overly sweet or nor pitifully bitter, this beautifully crafted piece of theatre gradually gobbles you in your seat. And in its wonderful effortlessness, you won't even realise it is happening.

Pleasance Courtyard, 1-27 Aug (not 13, 20), 12.30pm.

tw rating 4/5 | [Ciara Knowles]

The Complete History Of The BBC In 60 Minutes

Five Rounds Rapid

A lovely little hour from Terence and Ingrid, BBC-lovers, who take the audience through the humble beginnings of the BBC radio station in the twenties, through the decades that saw changes to TV, to colour, to competition, right up into the naughty noughties. Much appreciated discussions of whether Dr Who is a children's show, and if all costume dramas are naturally bonnet dramas serve to reveal our hosts (and audience's) most secret BBC thoughts, and are well illustrated by rare collectors' items. The journey culminates in harsh and cruel revelations though: the BBC is not Ingrid's only love. There are, dare one say it, other broadcasters out there... switch on to find where it all goes from here.

Sweet Grassmarket, 2-19 Aug (not 18), 5.05pm.

tw rating 3/5 | [Veronika Kallus]

The Proposal Fiddy West Productions

In a raw, gritty and disturbingly hilarious piece, this Manchester based company depict the tension which forms between two best friends as love comes between them. Driven by the irrationality of passion, Freddy goes about emotionally manipulating Pete in a series of riveting ways, ranging from filming a mistaken one night stand in a desperate attempt to blackmail Pete, and convincing Pete's girlfriend to snort cocaine with him. With a simple set and few scene changes, the production focuses more on the talents of an accomplished cast rather than on trying to impress the audience with complicated stage technicalities. A well written, original and darkly hilarious script which is sure to have you immersed into a small but twisted world of obsession.

TheSpace @Surgeon's Hall, 4-27 Aug, 5.15pm.

tw rating 5/5 | [Kristine Gallagher]

The Template For Lack Of Conversations

Alison Trower

Alison Trower presents a refreshingly profound performance where philosophy and biology are enthusiastically entwined. Striking a perfect balance between the emotionally engaging alongside a cold, sterile factual presentation of biology, in a series of surprising chapters this one woman show presents witty yet profound observations of the bigger picture. Trower charms her audience with interaction including a game of Jelly Baby snap, and harmonious sing-alongs, while at times this performance is unexpectedly amusing, as its star can catch you by surprise with her shocking deadpan nature. The transitions from each chapter to the next are seemingly unrelated, but are sharp and continually engaging, making it easy to understand

their common united theme: exploring the beauty, depth and complexity of human existence.

Laughing Horse @ Edinburgh City Football Club, 3-18 Aug, 12.00pm.

tw rating 4/5 | [Kristine Gallagher]

The Trench Les Enfants Terrible With Wales Millennium Centre, Luton Hat Factory

Imagine a quest narrative set beneath the battle lines of WW1, with a script that wants to be Shakespeare and occasional bluesy guitar interludes; you have 'The Trench'. Too many things are competing here. The witty physical theatre is some of the best I have seen: three chorus members surround the hero, Bert, playing with him, like he feels toyed with by his commanders. Yet Oliver Lansley, forgetting he's done enough by writing, directing and starring in the show, suddenly becomes narrator for Bert's actions in the 3rd person. It's all those "twixt"s and "doth"s that really undermine the performance, though: rather than letting that physicality speak for itself, Lansley has been carried away by his bardic pretensions.

Pleasance Courtyard, 1-27 Aug (not 14), 1.10pm.

tw rating 3/5 | [Lia Sanders]

Unmythable

Temple Theatre

This brilliant and comedic journey across the seas had the crowd roaring with laughter - and sometimes just roaring. Jason takes his Argonauts (the audience) on a hilarious mission to retrieve the Golden Fleece. Performing a sketch showcase of songs and scenes about various Greek legends, acting trio Troels Hagen Findsen, Paul O'Mahony and Will Pinchin flitted between characters, using minimal props and superb character definition to make a potentially confusing show completely streamlined and utterly entertaining. They were already in character pre-performance, handing out olives to audience members, and the show was fine-tuned from start to finish. With appearances from Heracles, Demeter, the Trojan horse and Hades, the scenes bore a resemblance to 'Horrible Histories' sketches, and saw the Argonauts "running, jumping, killing monsters" and most certainly "having fun".

Zoo, 3-27 Aug (not 15), 1.45pm.

tw rating 5/5 | [Hannah Sweetnam]

The Turn Of The Screw HookHitch Theatre

As a keen Henry James fan, I approached this one bright-eyed, bushy-tailed... essentially a walking cliché of enthusiasm. Though the period costumes appeared pretty, and the lighting style promising (very chiaroscuro) my hopeful little bubble burst fairly early on. Undoubtedly the female protagonist, with her Jane Austen manners and impeccable poise, was a solitary shining star, demanding audience attention as her character the governess might of her two charges. But many of the supporting roles felt unnecessary, and at times their duties looked to be that of stagehands rather than genuine players. However, the use of lifeless dolls to represent the children, manipulated by their ghostly possessors, was inspired. Sadly though, this adaptation simply felt too subversive to be immersive.

Zoo Southside, 3-12, 14-27 Aug, 12.45pm.

tw rating 2/5 | [Christy Brown]

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