

**EDITION #05:
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COMEDY

Sandi Toksvig My Valentine (Sandi Toksvig)

As Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy' swells to the rafters, an exuberant Sandi Toksvig emerges from the wings. Her show 'My Valentine' is, essentially, a celebration of her life: and what a ferociously funny life she has led. The Cambridge scholar takes a fond, retrospective look at the events that helped shape the person she is today. From drunken toilet trouble to canoeing the Zambezi River, nothing is left out. Teetering on the brink of eccentricity, Toksvig delights her audience with her fantastically witty observations, razor sharp intellect, and seemingly endless charisma. This astoundingly funny show is a true testament to the illustrious career of Sandi Toksvig and is most certainly not to be missed.

Pleasance Courtyard, until 11 Aug, 4.00pm.
tw rating 5/5 | [Peter Dorman]

Iain Stirling - At Home (Avalon Promotions)

Edinburgh born Iain Stirling looks at the idea of 'home' and what it means to us. He explores the idea through his experience of being an outsider in London - where he finds conversation far from his customary swear-every-second-word Scots' dialogue, and where nobody thinks about stealing the set of ladders from his neighbours' front garden. Through self-ridicule and brutal honesty, Iain comically brings to light what it means to be twenty-something and suddenly thrown into a form of adulthood. If you're Edinburgh born or have the tendency to use "barry" as a term of approval - you'll have plenty to relate to in this naturally raw and honest comedy show.

Pleasance Courtyard, Until 25 August, 7.30pm

tw rating 4/5 | [Kayleigh Head]

Chaos And Order - A True Story (Naomi Hefter)

Naomi Hefter returns to the Fringe for another year, this time taking on her first solo show. 'Chaos and Order' perfectly demonstrates Hefter's trademark honesty - she really doesn't hold anything back. She says exactly what she's thinking, and the majority of the time this is a definite strength. Undoubtedly a

natural comic, all that really lets her down is her lack of patience with the audience - she seems frustrated when things don't go as they ought to. That said, there really is nothing else to fault with her performance. Her anecdotes are hilarious, all the more so because of her claim that every story is true. It's not a comfortable comedy (there are awkward moments galore) but that isn't to say it's not funny or enjoyable.

Laughing Horse @ The Free Sisters, until 28 Aug (not 16, 17), 5.00pm.

tw rating 4/5 | [Stephanie Gray]

LOlympics Live

The 'LOlympics' is a great idea: it showcases a variety of acts from the Free Festival by giving a few performers a limited amount of time in which to lure people into their full length shows. The two compères held the show together well and provided some of the best jokes, but each performer raised more than sufficient laughs, along with some brave audience members who ventured voluntarily on to the stage. Gold medals were handed out to all deemed worthy and a medal is certainly something the show itself deserves, providing not just consistent hilarity throughout but an interesting sneak peek into further Fringe options. Not perfect, but not far off.

Laughing Horse @ The Free Sisters, 3-25 Aug, 4.00 pm.

tw rating 1 4/5 | [Ian Freeman]

Aaaaargh! It's the Monster Stand-Up Show (Masai Graham)

Since you'll leave wanting to be friends with the comedians on show, the venue is perfect - it's small enough to ensure that you'll bump in to at least one afterwards. Compèred by Alan Twitchen, proceedings start with a warm and energetic welcome, having even the most hungover of punters spluttering into their pints. It may be on at 3pm, but that doesn't stop the acts delivering stand-up to make the teeth clench and send the eye darting awkwardly round the room, to check if everyone else laughing along with you. Glenn Moore is particularly hilarious, and his well-spoken and charming presence have the room buzzing. A definite must-see introduction to some of the understated comedy available at the Festival.

Laughing Horse @ Jekyll & Hyde, until 25 Aug, 3.00 pm.

tw rating 4/5 | [Grace Brennan]

Afternoon Delight (Just The Tonic)

The Fringe can be an overwhelming place; one flick through the programme is enough to give you palpitations from the stress of choosing which shows to attend. Luckily, Just The Tonic are doing the hard work for you, and showcasing some of their acts in handy little bite-sized slots. It's like a lovely, delectable buffet of comedy, and family friendly to boot. Bargain. And most heartening of all, every act featured was glorious, inventive and funny. Particular highlights included Abigoliah Shamaun, who despite struggling a little to watch her Ps and Qs (and Fs) was shocking and very funny, and That Pair, whose combination of song-writing, comic timing and extreme social awkwardness made them very loveable indeed.

Just The Tonic at The Caves, until 25 Aug (not 13), 11.5pm.

tw rating 4/5 | [Elizabeth Jewell]

Andrew Lawrence - There Is No Escape (Andrew Lawrence / Chambers Management)

Lawrence himself states that he doesn't have the expected presence of a comedian, preferring to shuffle on stage quietly rather than welcome the applause he receives. He describes flicking a switch in his head before gigs, and this is clear from his self-deprecating humour; though how much is part of an act compared to his natural character is hard to tell. He makes his way through with little organisation, occasionally reassuring the audience that he does have some real material planned. The show suffers because of his choice to go with the flow, but ultimately only one fact matters - he's a damn funny guy, and does extraordinarily well to maintain an atmosphere in a less than packed venue.

Pleasance Courtyard, until 25 Aug, 8.50pm.

tw rating 3/5 | [Stephanie Gray]

Eric's Tales Of The Sea - A Submariner's Yarn (Eric's Tales Of The Sea)

Having served on a nuclear submarine for a number of years, Eric has now turned to a career as a storyteller, a role at which he truly excels. Funny, warm and engaging, he gives a unique perspective on life in an underwater vessel, a world which few of us will ever see. The show is hugely informative and focuses on the very real dangers

faced by those dive down to the depths, but it is also finds time for heart-warming personal stories, full of friendship and camaraderie. Eric spins his yarns masterfully and is adept at controlling the emotions of his audience, as they hang on virtually every word. Truly, a man with utterly tantalising tales.

Just The Tonic at the Caves, until 25 Aug (not 13), 2.00pm.

tw rating 5/5 | [Elspeth Rudd]

Bronston Jones: Life's Short, I'm Not (Bronston Jones / Free Festival)

Bronston Jones has plenty of anecdotes that should have the audience rolling in the aisles - beach parties with tramps, dating hookers and trips to Vegas - but somehow they never seem to set the world on fire. The punchlines just don't come fast enough in the first half, with stories wandering around in search of an ending. Once Jones gets a feel for the audience, he picks up the pace and the filth, but he's still a bit workmanlike in his delivery and it's not enough to save the show from low grade mediocrity. Jones may be a physical giant, but his show is distinctly average.

Laughing Horse @ Espionage, until 25, 8.45pm.

tw rating 2/5 | [Andrew Bell]

Charlie Smith: Too Tall For The Ride (Charlie Smith / Free Festival)

Billed as Ireland's tallest comedian, Charlie Smith presents an anecdotal show that also incorporates surrealist elements, with varying degrees of success. For the most part, Smith's charm and self-deprecating wit engages his audience, pulling them along as his stories, of the childhood and everyday struggles of a 6ft 8 man, delight and entertain. At times, however, it feels as though he's trying to do too much. An example of a particularly bemusing point occurred when Smith broke off from an enjoyable segment about 'Letterland' in order to play a recording of himself reading funny words out of a dictionary. With a tighter structure, Smith's show could be truly great - at the moment, there are still several loose threads.

Laughing Horse @ The Newsroom, until 13 Aug, 2.30pm.

tw rating 3/5 | [Tom Bateman]

Collier And Cox: Single, No Return (Collier And Cox / Free Festival)

Jenny Collier and Lucy Cox have



SNAP OF THE DAY: Breaking out at 'Aurora Winterborn's Candid Cabaret' at Club Rouge Photo: Rich Dyson

a theme - being desperate, single women - and a gimmick - talking at the same time. Neither of these do them any favours and serve to make the beginning of their set rather awkward. Once they settle into their individual sections, however, they seem to find their stride. Cox's routine is a bit patchy - the desperate woman material is weak but her songs and critique of dating books is much stronger. Collier is more consistent, but never exceeds beyond the level of reasonably amusing. This isn't a terrible show - you'll chuckle through most of it - but you won't find yourself asking Collier or Cox for a second date afterwards.

Laughing Horse @ The Free Sisters, until 25 Aug, 3.00pm.

tw rating 2/5 | [Andrew Bell]

Craig Hill - Tartan About! (MZA and CHILL Productions)

In Craig Hill's audience, no one is safe. For the first twenty minutes I was almost convinced he had no actual material and planned to riff from one wicked put-down to the next. Fearlessly he engages the audience with boy-scout like reactions and a rare confidence that provides unpredictable and hilarious results. But the crowd also

serves as a conduit, allowing Hill to seamlessly switch from improvised banter to entertaining stories, which he relays with feverish enthusiasm. He's a natural entertainer; performance and humour leak out of everything he does. There are probably more inventive comedians out there but no matter - 'Tartan About' guarantees flamboyance, great dancing and many, many, many laughs.

Underbelly Bristo Square, until 26 Aug (not 12, 19), 7.20pm.

tw rating 4/5 | [Andrew Pollard]

Life Winner (Free Festival)

Danny Deegan could become the biggest comedian out of Manchester since Jason Manford. Witty and energetic, he consistently had the small audience laughing, as he recounted life experiences including babysitting a friend during a magic mushroom trip and getting arrested in Kuala Lumpur airport. His seamless interactions with the crowd demonstrate that he's a natural-born comedian- improvising joke after joke. He gives the impression of being an affectionate man, humble to the audience. Many of his jokes carry the theme of friendship, appealing to both the young and old, female and male.

Crowd-friendly and approachable, it felt like he was your mate in the pub telling you how hilarious his week had been.

Laughing Horse @ Jekyll & Hyde, until 25 Aug, 5.15pm.

tw rating 5/5 | [Shiv Das]

Lucy Frederick - In Pursuit Of Cool (Lucy Frederick / Free Festival)

How do you become cool? Who decides what is cool? Why am I not cool? These are all questions that Lucy Frederick has pondered for some time in her attempts to keep on top of an ever-changing, hipster-splattered spectrum. The bubbly comedian illustrates, quite literally, her distinct lack of nonchalance, sharing tricks and tips she has found during the pursuit of this personal holy grail. Delivering to a packed house, Frederick produces a strong and diverse show, with just a hint of non consensual audience participation. An aura of ease descends upon the audience, and makes for a wonderfully light hearted and enjoyable afternoon.

Laughing Horse @ The Free Sisters, until 25 Aug, 2.00pm.

tw rating 4/5 | [Peter Dorman]

1/5 Bad

2/5 Mediocre

3/5 Good

4/5 Very Good

5/5 Excellent

James Acaster – Lawnmower (Phil McIntyre Entertainments)

Perhaps the most enjoyable aspect of James Acaster’s show is that every laugh feels entirely guilt-free. In his third solo Fringe show, he navigates through topics from the unfair infamy of Yoko Ono to his various business plans, never relying on the cheap and overused clichés that some comedians often fall back on for a mainstream appeal. He is instead brave enough to stick to his quirky and inoffensive humour that feels well thought out, fresh and fun. There is much comic build up and pay off throughout the show, keeping the audience constantly engaged and amused. With delightfully uncommon source material and a charismatic delivery, Acaster’s show is sure to be a success.

Pleasance Courtyard, until 25 Aug, 7.00pm.

tw rating 5/5 | [Rory Morgan]

New Art Club: Feel About Your Body (New Art Club)

Tom and Phil of the New Art Club take their well-structured silliness very seriously. Bursting with energy and marvellously engaging, the double act’s objective is to make their audience feel great about their bodies. Finding just the right balance between song and dance, comic turns and full-frontal male nudity, ‘Feel About Your Body’ never felt farcical, and had me laughing out loud throughout. From throwing themselves exuberantly about the stage imagining how wonderful being a butterfly must be, to a tightly choreographed dance number about a shed, their antics were a delight to watch. Perhaps Tom’s conversation with his sphincter allowed the energy of the show to dip ever so slightly. Still, I left feeling uplifted, and undeniably great: objective achieved.

Assembly George Square, until 25 Aug (not 13, 20), 6.45pm.

tw rating 4/5 | [Polly Davidson]

Shit-faced Shakespeare (Magnificent Bastard Productions)

Shit-faced Shakespeare’s premise speaks for itself, really: The

Bard’s ‘Much Ado About Nothing’ performed by a rotation of six talented actors: five sober and one utterly inebriated (in my case an Essex-accented ‘Beertrice’). But this doesn’t prepare you for the tempest of spanking, licking and impromptu chugging contests that are likely to pepper the performance, nor its propensity for audience participation. A troupe to be commended on their ingenuity in the face of wanton chaos, The Magnificent Bastards have concocted a wickedly charismatic cocktail of debauchery, improv and wild entertainment nearer a Molotov than an Old-fashioned. Explosively funny, this is remedy for anyone who ever thought Shakespeare was dull, though it should be consumed with caution.

C, until 26 Aug, 11.20pm

tw rating 4/5 | [Andrew Pollard]

Michael Che: Cartoon Violence (Michael Che/The Assembly Rooms)

American comedian Michael Che certainly takes no prisoners in his first Fringe show. He asks a lot of personal questions, ranging from the likes of “have you ever been bullied?” to “what do you think about during sex?” As a result much of the laughter he generates comes from the audience’s awkward responses and shocked reactions. However, Che might want to think about picking on a larger pool of audience members, as his constant focus on some individuals at times made things feel more like an interrogation than harmless banter. The material drawn on was humorous, if unexceptional, and if you enjoy audience participation and don’t mind sharing a few personal details, this might be a good opportunity to get a few secrets off your chest.

The Assembly Rooms, until 25 Aug (not 1), 10.00pm.

tw rating 3/5 | [Rory Morgan]

Rhys Mathewson - The Best £10 You’ll Ever Spend (Corrie McGuire for Objective Talent)

Armed with some velcro pound signs and a mop of hair that would wreak havoc if it came into contact with them, Rhys Mathewson makes an instantly engaging figure in his first Fringe appearance. The fast-talking Kiwi, who describes himself as “like a puppy with keys”, bounds enthusiastically through stories which nod to his New Zealand origins, with his McDonald’s Haka a particular high. Sometimes he doesn’t seem totally comfortable with the vehicle he’s driving, and the show’s framing device - an audience

member attaching a pound to a bathmat for every laugh - feels unnecessarily distracting. But even if it isn’t quite yet the best £10 you’ve spent, you’ll still be glad you did. Mathewson is a name that’s likely to stick.

Pleasance Courtyard, until 26 Aug (not 13), 7.15pm.

tw rating 4/5 | [Sarah Richardson]

JAM Comedy (Joe Foster/ Adam Race / Mike Cox / Free Festival)

JAM comedy offers the ultimate combination of comedy and preserves, as three young comedians in the form of Foster, Race and Cox offer their audience a varied diet of stand-up, with a pot of jam to take home afterwards. The performers’ different styles ensure that there truly is something for everyone here, as Foster and Cox’s observational style complements the surrealist rambblings of Race. All performers interact well with the audience, building the conversations they create into their acts with easy skill. With a greater variety of material - perhaps moving observations away from home and family to some more diverse topics - this show would be excellent. A small push towards greater things should be well within its grasp.

Laughing Horse @ Jekyll & Hyde, until 11 Aug, 12.15pm

tw rating 4/5 | [Tom Bateman]

DANCE & PHYSICAL THEATRE

Chaucer All Strung Up (The Franklin’s Tale) (Strung Up Theatre Company)

Geoffrey Chaucer’s tale of love and loyalty is swept right into the modern era in this vivid and engaging production from Strung Up Theatre Company. Here the action takes place in a circus, which helps to emphasise the magically mysterious themes found in the original tale. The use of puppets is eccentric yet effective; it provides a medievalism to the production, which appears to be an historic nod to Chaucer. It would be wonderful to see more of the acrobatic moments; nevertheless, those on offer are performed beautifully by a very strong cast. Those familiar with the story will be impressed by this re-imagining, whilst newcomers will discover a colourful and endearing introduction.

C nova, until 26 Aug (not 12), 2.00pm.

tw rating 4/5 | [Mairi McNicol]

In Two Minds (Dancing Souls and Theatre SOMA)

A joint venture between Hong Kong’s Shan Chan and the UK’s Suzi Cunningham, ‘In Two Minds’ is billed as demonstrating the healing power of movement, though it’s actually more about the experience of mental illness. The results are patchy: the choreography is sharp and skilful with some interesting highlights (mental illness is likened to a noisy kid in the cinema), but overall it doesn’t go beyond ticking the usual boxes. A gratingly clichéd refrain of horror movie-style nursery rhymes just made my toes curl. An innovative but all too brief middle-section shuns the established tone, and is simple, powerful and moving. It’s a shame that the rest of the performance doesn’t quite follow suit.

C, until 10 Aug, 5.05pm.

tw rating 3/5 | [Holly Sharp]

Confused in Syracuse (OPS Theatre)

If you think of Ancient Greece, you’re probably not picturing a centaur whose backside has emancipated itself. Add a raunchy love triangle and you’ve got ‘Confused in Syracuse’, a bawdy slapstick farce from St Petersburg based company OPS theatre. Energy is there in buckets; unfortunately, substance is not. Fake boobs and fart jokes abound, though both ends of the centaur do a cracking job of tottering around for an hour on wonky stilts. The production seems unable to decide if it’s a sketch show or a play, and a combination of no dialogue with only sporadic choreography neither clarifies the plot nor warms you to the characters. Not bad for an occasional giggle, but expect to be left feeling very confused (in Syracuse).

C @ Chambers Street, until 26 Aug (not 13), 3.30pm.

tw rating 2/5 | [Holly Sharp]

Transit (À Point Theatre Company)

The train is ready to depart and À Point want to take us on a journey. From a small house in England across all of Europe, the entire story is told using only a few luggage bags, an accordion and their own bodies and voices. There is no weak link; each member of this tight ensemble is as talented as the next. They also know when things are best left unsaid, using silence as a powerful contrast. There were a few moments where it wasn’t clear what they were trying to convey in their physicality, but overall there is a wonderful mix of physical theatre,

dance and music in this funny and poignant tale.

C, until 26 Aug, 6.15pm.

tw rating 4/5 | [Lizzie Milton]

Spiltmilk Say Dance (Spiltmilk Dance)

Some dance steps are so timeless that they’re instantly recognisable. From the Jive, to the Charleston, through to even Gangam Style, ‘Spiltmilk Say Dance’ takes us through the evolution of popular dancing. Three female dancers perform the most emblematic dancing styles from present to past; while the music is presented from the modern to the classical. The resulting combination is a humorous mix of Mozart with the Macarena, and Frank Sinatra with Saturday Night Fever. At the same time, the perfectly synchronised choreography will make the hand-jivings and flip-flappings seem less complex than you originally thought. Keen dancers will immediately connect to this impressive mixture of beats and movements, while the not-so-keen might just consider looking out those leg-warmers.

C nova, until 26 Aug (not 13), 3.45pm.

tw rating 4/5 | [Natalia Equihua]

Exposed (Impulse Collective)

This intelligent and creative piece of physical theatre offers a unique insight into the human psyche, focusing on the impulses within a consumer-driven world. The talented young actors deliver both a light-hearted ridicule of structured culture and a dark exploration of suppressed emotion; building a show entangled with humour and intrigue. The writing and timing across the performance are brilliant, allowing the cast to engage with the audience and introducing an interesting style of conscious, interactive theatre. ‘Exposed’ is a prime example of the dramatic potential to address profound questions through slapstick antics and simple storytelling, all while still entertaining and surprising with its message – be prepared to leave feeling inquisitive!

C aquila, until 26 Aug, 12.05 pm.

tw rating 4/5 | [Grace Brennan]

MUSIC

Vive – Jazz A Cappella (Vive)

For the first few songs, you may think this jazzy six-piece owes their modern, upbeat sound more to Jamie Cullum than Ella Fitzgerald. As their joyful cover of the Lighthouse Family’s ‘High’

demonstrates, they’re heavily influenced by pop, but this is only one of the diverse styles they play with. In a snappy set consisting mostly of original arrangements, they take in a flurry of textures, blending crisp arpeggios, scat, beatboxing and a weird but wonderful trumpet impression. If at times their compositions are overly intent on demonstrating this extensive range, they also show off an impressive experimental side which gives their music an appealing edge. With bright harmonies and an unashamedly poppy outlook, they’re a refreshing and reviving act.

SpaceCabaret @ 54, until 8 Aug, 6.10pm.

tw rating 4/5 | [Dave Fargnoli]

THEATRE

Globophobia (Urban Fox Theatre Company)

An amazingly insightful new piece of theatre directed by Amy Gilmartin and written by Dave Fargnoli and Lindsay Miller. Globophobia depicts the stories of seven characters, each dealing with different fears and anxieties; some rational, some strange but all of which affect their lives. Sometimes silly, sometimes deeply devastating; the intimate performance space works well for a beautifully written and descriptive play that deals an important part of the human condition. The acting is flawless, bringing the script to life and creating three dimensional characters that are easy to empathise with and at times seem to resonate your own fears. This talented bunch are definitely going places!

Sweet Grassmarket, until 25 Aug, 8.20pm.

tw rating 5/5 | [Anita Magee]

Silence In Court (emeraldBLUE)

For anyone disappointed by not having done Her Majesty’s Court’s jury service yet, this show provides the perfect opportunity for you. A very official affair, indulging in the theatricality of the court room, this is a dock with a difference. Presented with conflicting testimonies of the rape of Jennifer Lyons, the audience take the law into their own hands to declare the final verdict. This excitingly interactive production deals the ‘jury’ a tough case, made at times infuriating by the holes and hypothetical problems of this being just a show. A touch contrived in parts, but generally ringing out with realism, ‘Silence In Court’ is an eye-opening and fun foray into the way

we perform justice.

New Town Theatre, until 25 Aug, 4.00pm and 7.30pm.

tw rating 3/5 | [Katharine Wootton]

The Oldest Man in Catford (Quidem Productions)

From the first scene of this show, we’re aware something’s up - the extremely elderly gent of the title reveals himself to be only pretending to be infirm. This comedy’s more than half monologue, with Reg (Stewart Howson) talking to his dead wife and friend; recalling the War and resisting the patronising overtures of social services. The central relationship with his kind, bolshy great-granddaughter Julie (Alice Bernard) is convincing, and their banter is fun. The gentle, contented sadness is shattered in the last third: gripping and socially aware, it drops the cake jokes and intergenerational grumbling. I can’t give anything anyway, but the transition is natural, and the rest of the show follows smoothly from its sudden extreme tensions. Surprising.

New Town Theatre, until 25th, 2.30pm.

tw rating 4/5 | [Gavin Leech]

Newton (Jack Klaff)

This is a story about an ambivalent Sir Isaac Newton, as well as a celebration of those around him. Jack Klaff becomes more than one character; the renowned physician himself, as well as his niece Charlotte and his biographer, to name a few. One cannot resist being immediately and inherently captivated by Klaff’s allure and the carefully constructed chaos that characterises his storytelling, enhanced by his remarkable ability to engage with every single member of the audience. This thrilling one-man show is aided by the intimate, semi-circular lecture theatre in which the play is set. If you’ve ever thought that scientists were boring, this might just be the show to prove you wrong.

Summerhall, until 25 Aug (not 6, 13, 20).

tw rating 4/5 | [Iris Ordean]

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“Our song-writing sessions usually involve me sitting at the piano or pulling some chords out of the accordion, while Bernadette’s stream of consciousness takes whatever path it decides. And there is always a lot of gin involved...”

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