

EDITION #09:
SUN 11 AUG 2013

COMEDY

Casual Violence: Om Nom Nominous (Casual Violence! Comedy)

Permit me, if you will, to gush a little about 'Om Nom Nominous', because as far as I'm concerned, it did everything a sketch show should. The material was enormously varied, with each sketch bringing something innovative, expertly crafted and outrageously creative to the stage. The written material was tight, dragging the audience across the emotional spectrum. Blackly comic moments offered surprisingly moving conclusions, with the travails of the tragically misguided Human Defence League being a particularly good example of this. The performers' evident enjoyment was infectious, and regular ad-libs kept a fun, fresh feel throughout. Casual Violence cannot be commended highly enough for making sketch comedy great again.

The Voodoo Rooms, until 17 Aug, 7.15pm.
tw rating 5/5 | [Tom Bateman]

David Morgan - Pretty (Corrie McGuire For Objective Talent)

Greeting each person as they come through the door, Morgan is impossible not to love. He sports a quiff as big as his personality, and regales the crowd with a number of grievances about his general lack of prettiness. Thriving on the intimate nature of the venue, the flamboyant funny-man proves utterly engaging, as he delivers a mixture of stories and sharp one liners drawing on his life, love affairs, and use of lewd gay sex apps. Morgan's innate ability to form an instant bond with the audience makes him perfect for the Fringe. If you would like to adopt a fantastically witty best friend for an hour, then 'Pretty' is the show for you.

Underbelly Bristo Square, until 25 Aug, 7.00pm. tw rating 4/5 | [Peter Dorman]

Dr Professor Neal Portenza Interactive Goat Hour (Dr Professor Neal Portenza/ PBH Free Fringe)

If verbal and physical assault are your idea of a fun way to spend an hour, Dr Professor Neal Portenza may be the man for you. Beginning with an awkward and protracted section featuring a collapsing

microphone stand, the seat-squirming set went from the absurd to the plain stupid. If audience members were under any illusion about the regard Portenza held for them, being pelted with foam balls and threatened with a mallet ought to have made things clear. The gap between absurdist seat-of-the-pants humour and intimidation was definitely crossed; and though some general amusement was provoked, it's clear that many laughs were a result of nerves rather than any genuine enjoyment.

Dram House Upstairs until 24 Aug, 8.00pm. tw rating 1/5 [Christie Rolley]

Jem Brookes - Puntitled (Jem Brookes / Free Festival)

The affably natured Jem Brookes sits on stage, swigging pints and spouting corny jokes. He looks so at home that the show seems reminiscent of an embarrassing dad proclaiming his best puns at a party. The quality of the gags varies greatly, as he bounces back and forth between smashing one-liners, groan-inducing puns, and collectively misunderstood jokes. 'Puntitled' is the stand-up equivalent of a whoopee cushion; not the most highbrow of entertainment, but nevertheless still capable of gaining the inevitable giggle. Like Brookes himself, the show is exactly what it says on the tin; puns, puns, and more puns. So grab a pint and get ready to groan.

Laughing Horse @ The Counting House, until 25 Aug, 9.30pm.

tw rating 3/5 | [Peter Dorman]

Lords Of Strut (Sharon Burgess Productions)

If Louis Spence hosted a teleshopping programme, this would be the product. Wearing obscene amounts of spandex and glitter, 'Lords Of Strut' begin a hilarious performance, mocking dancers who take themselves too seriously. The show is both genuinely funny and brilliantly choreographed. The tongue-in-cheek camp and deliberate blunders build on the performers' charming Irish personae, and a strong devotion to the music of Wham! is thrown in for good measure. The irony, of course, is that, under the pretence of crapness, the two cast members possess a raw acrobatic talent, performing moves that will make your palms sweat as you watch them. A must for dance fans and budding divas alike.

Assembly George Square, until 25 Aug (not 12), 7.30 pm.

tw rating 5/5 | [Grace Brennan]

Gagging For Attention (DMU Comedy)

You've got to love those unrepentant comics who bay for your love and affection, right? 'Gagging For Attention' is yet another variety show, this time showcasing newer performers, some of them attending the Fringe for the first time, but don't let that put you off. The line-up changes each day, but the stand-out tonight was David Murphy, effortlessly competing with self-deprecating humour and easy banter with the audience. Sarah Keyworth also shone, her awkward pun-based comedy pulling in the biggest laughs. This show proves you don't have to be a Festival veteran to pull off a tightly paced, raucous stand-up show: these fresh-faced funny people may very well be your overpriced, grouchy comics of the future!

Just The Tonic at The Caves, until Aug 25 (not 13), 2.15pm

tw rating 4/5 | [Patricia-Ann Young]

10 Films With My Dad (Aidan Goatley / PBH Free Fringe)

Growing up, Aidan Goatley bonded with his father over a shared love of film, and here he spends an hour reliving this relationship to a packed house. This is more than just a review of his favourite films - Goatley is a very good storyteller, mixing humour and sentiment smoothly for most of this show. Whilst no part of the performance was especially remarkable, and it occasionally bordered on twee, the show was an enjoyable examination of how relationships work, develop and affect our lives. His views on film were also interesting: some analysis of the homoerotic nature of 'Die Hard' and an altered version of 'Jaws' went down especially well with the audience, even if it wasn't really silver screen material.

The Voodoo Rooms, until 25 Aug, 2.25pm.
tw rating 3/5 | [Robert McGowan Stuart]

Women Of An Uncertain Age (Flip Webster and Maggie Bourgein)

This sketch show had the audience chuckling until the very end. Focusing on the lives and problems of older women, it actively involves the audience and the two leading ladies play fantastically off each other. There were some shining moments of brilliance, though some of the jokes were a little bit obvious and there was an overuse of stereotypes at times. The subject of the show also meant that the

humour was quite restricted and, as a result, I found some of the sketches a little boring, though the strength of some scenes compensated for the weaker ones. Featuring a pair of dynamic actors, this might make you giggle if you're of a certain (or uncertain) age.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, until 26 Aug (not 8, 15, 22), 2.30pm.

tw rating 3/5 | [Roberta Thomson]

Cambridge Footlights: Canada (Cambridge Footlights)

'Canada' is the newest show from the critically acclaimed Cambridge Footlights and, whilst you expect sketch shows to sometimes have the odd missed joke or sketch, I was expecting more from the Footlights and felt disappointed. Some of the sketches were refreshing and innovative, but several felt over-worked and like they were trying too hard to be different or strange. The highlight was a sketch that made use of the reference sheet cards which had been left on every chair - it was the sort of genuinely clever and funny stuff you'd expect from a troupe with such high pedigree. All four members of the Footlights gave humorous performances, but overall it was more occasional chuckle than uncontrollable laughter.

Pleasance Dome, until 26 Aug (not 12), 5.20pm.

tw rating 3/5 | [Sarah Virgo]

Lights! Camera! Improvise!

There are no words to describe the brilliance of this show. Of course, at first the audience is in charge, and must suggest a setting, title, and type of show. Then the actors take over, providing absolutely top-class comedy, as each and every one of them pulls off unexpected parts with perfect fluidity and consummate comedic style. Obvious character stereotypes are milked for all they're worth, which certainly proves effective judging by the number of laughs gained. The ease with which all performers thought on their feet was, quite simply, utterly astounding. If you fancy laughing until you cry, 'Lights! Camera! Improvise!' should be your first port of call.

Underbelly Cowgate, until 25 Aug, 7.20pm.
tw rating 5/5 | [Jessica Cropper]

Silky: It Was This Show Or Have Kids (Silky / The Stand Comedy Club)

Silky opens himself up to his audience with an hour of often



SNAP OF THE DAY: 'Everything That Happened In The 20th Century, Seen Through The Eyes Of A Liar' at The Counting House. Photo: Natalia Equihua

touching, and always funny stand-up. His fluent and intelligent storytelling is impressive, and carries with it a genuine sense of character. Assurances are made to the audience that they must have fun, and jokes are offered on demand if somebody raises their hand; a touch that gives the show a friendly, informal feel. Silky's willingness and capacity to laugh at himself is another aspect that adds warmth, as is the bitter sweet final revelation of his dilemma, and the tragicomic sense of being trapped between the things he loves the most. This is a performer whose genuine charm captures his crowd. I urge you to go and see it for yourself.

The Stand Comedy Club II, until 25 Aug (not 12), 2.30pm.

tw rating 5/5 | [Tom Bateman]

MUSIC

Wellington International Ukulele Orchestra (WIUO in association with Gilded Balloon)

In bizarre clothing and bright colours, this ten-piece orchestra took to the stage, armed with their ukuleles. However, as the performance went on, it seemed to be less about the ukuleles and more about self-indulgent solo singing performances. That's not to say the songs weren't good - they were, with a good range of old and new,

a funny use of props and wonderful harmonies that formed a bright and charismatic performance (if a little cheesy). But, whilst some parts were obviously tongue-in-cheek, for the most part it was ambiguous whether the New Zealand performers were taking themselves seriously or not, leaving cringe-worthy moments that took away from the actually very good music.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, until 26 Aug (not 12, 19), 6.00pm.

tw rating: 3/5 | [Helena Wadia]

Adam Page

Instantly disarming, Adam Page introduces you to his world of passionate music-making before getting straight down to business, crafting improvised songs that beggar belief. Page's serious side is captured in an incredible saxophone centrepiece and an inspired melody on the harmony-flute that left the audience reeling with emotion. Blending humour and music is no easy task but Page's interludes, often appearing mid-song, give the impression that you are merely enjoying a pint with him; except when he pulls out an instrument, or five, and blows you away with his merry dancing, great singing and incredible skill. Soulful sax, banging beats and excellent anecdotes make this show worth seeing twice, three times, or all month long. It's that good.

Underbelly Cowgate, until 25 Aug, (not 12) 4.50pm.

tw rating 5/5 | [Sam Turner]

THEATRE

Diary Of A Madman (Living Pictures)

This darkly comic one-man piece is based on a nineteenth-century Russian short story studying social status and insanity. Robert Bowman's Poprishchin is reminiscent of Varys from 'Game Of Thrones', his deluded sliminess making you unsure whether to feel repulsion or pity. Lingering on uncomfortable moments with masterful intensity, he's unafraid to look you in the eye - I'm almost certain one scathing line about theatre critics was aimed directly at me! I only wish his performance had been trusted to carry itself without the musical interruptions which, though often effective, became distractingly frequent. This may be best enjoyed by those with an interest in pre-Revolutionary Russia or Nikolai Gogol's work, however, those hungry to be confronted with an excellently curious character will also be captivated.

Venue 13, until 24 Aug (not 12), 4.00pm.

tw rating 4/5 | [Amber-Page Moss]

1/5 Bad
2/5 Mediocre
3/5 Good
4/5 Very Good
5/5 Excellent

Feral (Tortoise In A Nutshell)

Before reading this, please set your mind to superlative mode, because we are dealing with an absolutely outstanding show! In a place where mixed-media meets music and puppetry, five remarkable performers create an entire world from scratch, before slowly obliterating it in front of your eyes. The level of visual accuracy is amazing and the concept is appealing because of its authenticity. The team is so creatively resourceful that I can't even begin to imagine what they would be capable of if given limitless resources. The show is so compelling, I could have sat for hours completely emerged in the story. I eventually left desperate for more: a must see!

Summerhall, until 25 Aug (not 13, 20), 8.00pm. tw rating 5/5 | [Iris Ordean]

Roughs (d'Animate Theatre Company)

Taking on not one, but two Samuel Beckett plays in a single hour is no small task. 'Rough For Theatre I' depicts an unlikely friendship forged out of a common desperation for human contact, swiftly followed by 'Rough For Theatre II', in which two businessmen calmly discuss the suicidal man perched on their window ledge. As is standard with Beckett, it often slips in and out of the surreal, which in such a short show can lead to confusion, particularly if you're not familiar with the plays. Adam El Hagar and Michael Rivers' somewhat clumsy use of props is countered by their infectious enthusiasm for performing. 'Roughs' is a vibrant and ambitious - though ultimately confusing - performance.

Zoo Southside, until 26 Aug, 16.35pm. tw rating 3/5 | [Sophie Nicolli]

Shattered! (Chimaera Productions / PBH's Free Fringe)

Informative, emotional and heartfelt, this selection of monologues is designed to get you thinking deeply about the stigma surrounding mental health. The stories, told by seven young actors, cover a range of issues from postnatal depression to alcoholism, and are based on posts from mental health blog Shattering The Stigma. The cast, simply dressed in blue hospital gowns, emphasise that mental illness should be treated with the exact same respect as physical illness. While the acting may not always be convincing, and the sound effects and music are distracting at times, the message is clear - it's not our job to be brave, it's your job to be understanding. Please be aware that this show may be triggering to some.

Cafe Camino, until 24 Aug (not 6, 13, 20), 7.30pm. tw rating 3/5 | [Sophie Nicolli]

Nobel (Theatre With Teeth)

This interpretive dance set, about stem cell research, is a great example of just how wonderfully eccentric a Fringe show can be. The production, by Exeter students Theatre With Teeth, allays all concerns you might have that a show like this is perhaps just too out-there. It is a thoughtful and inquisitive play which doesn't preach, merely poses questions and states facts about the ethical boundaries of science. The dance is exuberant and innovative, with minimalist props used to maximum effect, like the balloons and UV paint used to create spectral premonitions of skeletons. The play is superbly cast, each performer placed perfectly within an ensemble who are working assuredly and

calmly to disprove any prejudices that dance cannot speak.

Zoo Monkeyhouse, until 26 Aug (not 11, 18), 12.30pm

tw rating 4/5 | [James Hampson]

Operation: Love Story (Jennifer Williams / PBH's Free Fringe)

Do you believe rom-coms are destroying the fabric of our society? Writer and performer Jennifer Williams appears to think so. In this delightful one-woman show, she plays a neurotic singleton who needs to step away from the Bridget Jones box-set and back into reality. Her efforts to make her neighbours fall in love are sweet, funny and sometimes just a little scary. Aside from the gentle comedy, Williams has a more serious aim: to highlight the subtle hypocrisies the media feeds us about romance. Some beautiful but hard-edged ranting contrasts nicely with the lighter comic capers in 'Operation: Love Story', rescuing it from being just a fluffy, ineffectual yarn. Playing at 12.15pm, it would make a great lunch hour treat.

La Tasca, until 24 Aug, 12.15pm.

tw rating 4/5 | [Melissa Steel]

Peep (Natural Shocks)

'Peep' is self-styled as "Edinburgh's most intimate venue", but only if your idea of intimacy is a wipe-clean booth, with mirrored glass and rubber flaps to keep off the shaming gaze of families outside. It presents a daily roster of shows, linked by the theme of subversive sexiness. Tonight in the 'Anatomy' slot, Lottie Kixx danced in a wedding dress, then a leather thong, then a wedding dress again. The experience of sitting, alone, in a sterile booth watching a performer who can't see you made me long for the awkward tiny audiences where you're desperately avoiding the act's gaze. Audiences were encouraged to "drop in and out" as they pleased over the two hours. Many dropped out, few dropped back in.

Assembly George Square, until 26 Aug (not 13), 11.00am - 11.00pm.

tw rating 2/5 | [James Hampson]

Sandel (Boys Of The Empire Productions)

'Sandel' is a compelling, sometimes uncomfortable play about a controversial topic. It tells the love story between a young undergraduate and an even younger choirboy, set in 1960s Oxford. The piece is well acted and engaging throughout; Tom Cawte gave a great performance as the precocious young Sandel, nicely matched with Ryan Penny's

performance as David, whose character somehow manages to be far more likeable despite the obvious problem of his attraction to a young boy. The play challenges the idea of forbidden love and seems to present Sandel and Rogers' mutually sought relationship as pure and romantic. But is it possible or desirable to see past the fact that Sandel is just a child? An intriguing piece of theatre.

theSpace @ Surgeon's Hall, until 24 Aug (not 11), 4.05pm.

tw rating 4/5 | [Elsbeth Rudd]

The Waiting Room (Waiting Room)

Four people, with four different invitations to one room, wait and wait. From the streetwise to the rich to the educated, all learn their place here. Characters become both hunter and hunted, as mind-games play out and fears reach fever-pitch. A 'Lord Of The Flies' type brawl for survival, in this waiting room the most primitive instincts and most civilised tools of thought are relied upon. Grippingly tense in plot, 'The Waiting Room' can at times become stuffy with over-philosophising as wordy, hollow monologues fill up the gaps between scenes. Passionately acted (sometimes to excessive extremes), this is a production driven by strong, memorable characters. It makes the waiting game excitingly intense and dangerous.

Assembly George Square, until 26 Aug, 11.30am.

tw rating 3/5 | [Katharine Wootton]

Yellow Pears (Swept Up Theatre)

Futile and without fervour, this poorly devised show lacked even the bare basics of theatre. Without a plot, it bumbles on without any sense of direction or point. It's supposed to be about the friendship between two people, but there's no real action and characters appear two-dimensional, lacking even a hint of development. Described as a "physical comedy", about two unconventional stall sellers with "seriously good dance moves", the only laughs it received were at the cringe-worthy moments of uninspiring dance. I'm struggling to find any redeeming features in this production; I suppose the acting wasn't bad, but that's not nearly enough to give some significance to this rather pointless production.

Zoo, until 26 Aug (not 12), 3.00pm.

tw rating 1/5 | [Anita Magee]

Voluntary Departure (Vagabond Productions)

"Welcome and goodbye. We guarantee to serve thee well". A

rather sinister advert for a rather sinister business: providing services for those determined to commit suicide. Don't be fooled into thinking that this is 'just' a comedy though: this play is ultimately a dystopian tale about a sinister near-future, about alienation and the changes in human values. The conversation between the business's persuasive owner and a potential customer develops towards quite a surprising end. Granted, the dialogues are a bit tedious at times and the script is in serious need of an edit, but the acting is sharp and enjoyable. And if you've ever sat through a tedious Fringe show wishing you could just end it all, this might be the show to change your mind.

Underbelly Bristo Square, until 26 Aug (not 12, 19), 12.10pm.

tw rating 3/5 | [Iris Ordean]

Boris & Sergey's Vaudevillian Adventure (Flabbergast Theatre)

Bunraku puppetry involves three people manipulating the limbs, head and torso of a puppet. Flabbergast Theatre demonstrate mastery of the art form in this show, which contains sequences of mesmerising complexity and mind-boggling hilarity. The coordination and choreography involved is comparable to complex physical theatre, and the incredibly perceptive movements truly breathe life into the characters. Yet all this art and talent is wrapped in the narrative casing of two filthy mouthed, devilishly mischievous ruffians: Boris and Sergey. It's as funny as it is awe-inspiring, with a wicked sense of humour somewhere between 'Looney Tunes' and 'Family Guy'. If you're looking for a wildcard, 'Boris & Sergey' are the safest bet you can make this year.

Underbelly, until 26 Aug (not 13), 10.00pm.

tw rating 5/5 | [Andrew Pollard]

Hérons (Exeter University Theatre Company)

Tears stream furiously down his cheeks. The boy points his gun at us as we enter the theatre and immediately we are immersed in the tension and drama of 'Hérons', by acclaimed playwright Simon Stephens. After his father witnesses and reports the vicious murder of a girl, 14 year-old Billy tries to avoid being attacked by Scott, brother of one of the murderers. The plot is intricate and cruel, but at times hard to follow as key elements happen off-stage. Yet the brilliant performances by Jamie Manton as Billy, and George Watkins as Scott, really connect you with the anguish and desperation of their

characters. This play explores the consequences of pushing a person's vulnerability to the limit.

Zoo, until 26 Aug (not 21), 12.30pm.

tw rating 3/5 | [Natalia Equihua]

Bath Time (Ruaraidh Murray)

In this coming-of-age tale, we witness how the interweaving of three boys' lives defines the men they become. The really impressive element of the performance is that it's a one-man show: Ruaraidh Murray deserves serious praise for his clear characterisation and the remarkable rapidity with which he switches characters. Beginning with the comic innocence - and loss of innocence - of their early teens, the stakes get progressively higher for Spike, Joe Joe and Billy as they grow older. Although entertaining, it feels like the narrative flounders for the majority of the play, and only in the last ten minutes does it regain its footing. But Murray is the star of the piece, filling each of his many roles with charisma.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, until 26 Aug, 3.15pm.

tw rating 3/5 | [Immi Calderwood]

The Bloody Ballad (Gagglebabb/Theatr lolo)

Think 'Grease' meets 'Scream' in this chilling tale of murder, arson and betrayal. Based on the old Welsh tale of 'Mary Maid', an innocent girl with a dark past is betrayed by her lover and finds herself in a desperate situation. It can be difficult for a stage performance to make an audience feel as scared as a film can, but here the rockabilly band and creepy characters get the job done. The audience members jump out of their seats at the sudden twists, but are singing along to the next catchy ballad moments later - could this be the next 'Rocky Horror Show'? I wouldn't recommend walking home alone after a night at 'The Bloody Ballad'.

Assembly Roxy, until 25 Aug, 7.45pm.

tw rating 5/5 | [Rebecca Lunn]

How To Avoid Making An Entrance Of Yourself (Dot Howard)

An act so out of the box that it has crawled out of the box, into the bag, and then eaten the bag. I assure you, this is not merely a metaphor. An avant-garde piece of performance art, this is probably one of the most interesting things at the Fringe. It features fabulously inventive props, sign language and possibly the only known incidence of enjoyable audience interaction. The two performers are rarely on stage at the same time, making this feel essentially like a solo show. The theme of 'making an entrance' is

explored, from stage entrances to birth. Each segment in turn leaves you laughing, uneasy, incredulous, laughing again and, ultimately, thoughtful about the nature of theatre and art.

Pleasance Hunt and Darton Café, until 25 Aug (not 12, 19), 6.00pm.

tw rating 4/5 | [Isobel Steer]

London Road, Sea Point (KBT Productions)

'London Road, Sea Point' is a truly wonderful piece of theatre. Robyn Scott and Ntombi Makhutshi are nothing short of glorious as a Jewish widow and a Nigerian immigrant, an unlikely duo thrust together by chance and circumstance, who discover they have more in common than they thought. The perceptibly real quality of their relationship is something to behold: the actors only need touch, or exchange a glance, for their intimacy to take your breath away. The play is by no means perfect - the accents (particularly that of Makhutshi) are somewhat inauthentic and unconvincing - but despite any shortcomings, it is still undeniably brilliant. Moving in the extreme, painful, joyous, and so consummately realised, 'London Road, Sea Point' is unforgettably wonderful.

Assembly George Square, until 26 Aug (not 12), 1.50pm.

tw rating 5/5 | [Otamere Guobadia]

Austen's Women (Dyad Productions)

"Men of sense do not want silly wives". Indeed they don't, and here Rebecca Vaughan marvellously creates some of Jane's Austen's best loved women, both silly and virtuous (though perpetually occupied with the trouble of marriage). This one-woman show is a theatrical masterpiece, perfectly constructing thirteen individual characters. The wacky enthusiasm of Miss Bates, the fiery despair of Marianne Dashwood, the clueless folly of Mary Stanhope - they're all there. Using Austen's words, Vaughan's performance is utterly faultless and vastly entertaining. If you don't know the stories, then the allusions may be slightly lost on you, but it's not only for hardcore Austen fans. This is subtle and stripped back drama with spot on acting. Effortless, non-stop, exceptional.

Assembly George Square, until 25 Aug (not 12, 13, 19), 11.40am.

tw rating 5/5 | [Natasha Gartside]

INFO

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“ ALWAYS carry some hand sanitizer - God knows where people’s hands have been over the course of a month and Norovirus is the last thing we want on top of everything else. Trust me, there’s nothing worse than having botty trouble during a show. I learnt the hard way at a Michael Bolton Concert in 2010 ”

Bev - as in 'Eleanor Thom: I Am Bev' - offers some vital tips for surviving the Fringe. Read her full guest column online at www.ThreeWeeks.co.uk/2013ET



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