

ThreeWeeks

EDINBURGH



PHILIP WHITCHURCH



MR B

Catriona Knox: Post-boom bloom

PLUS Dan Clark | Rayguns Look Real Enough | Vladimir Shcherban from Belarus Free Theatre
Njo Kong Kie | Dane Baptiste | Jason Cook | Barry Ferns | plus awards news and lots of reviews

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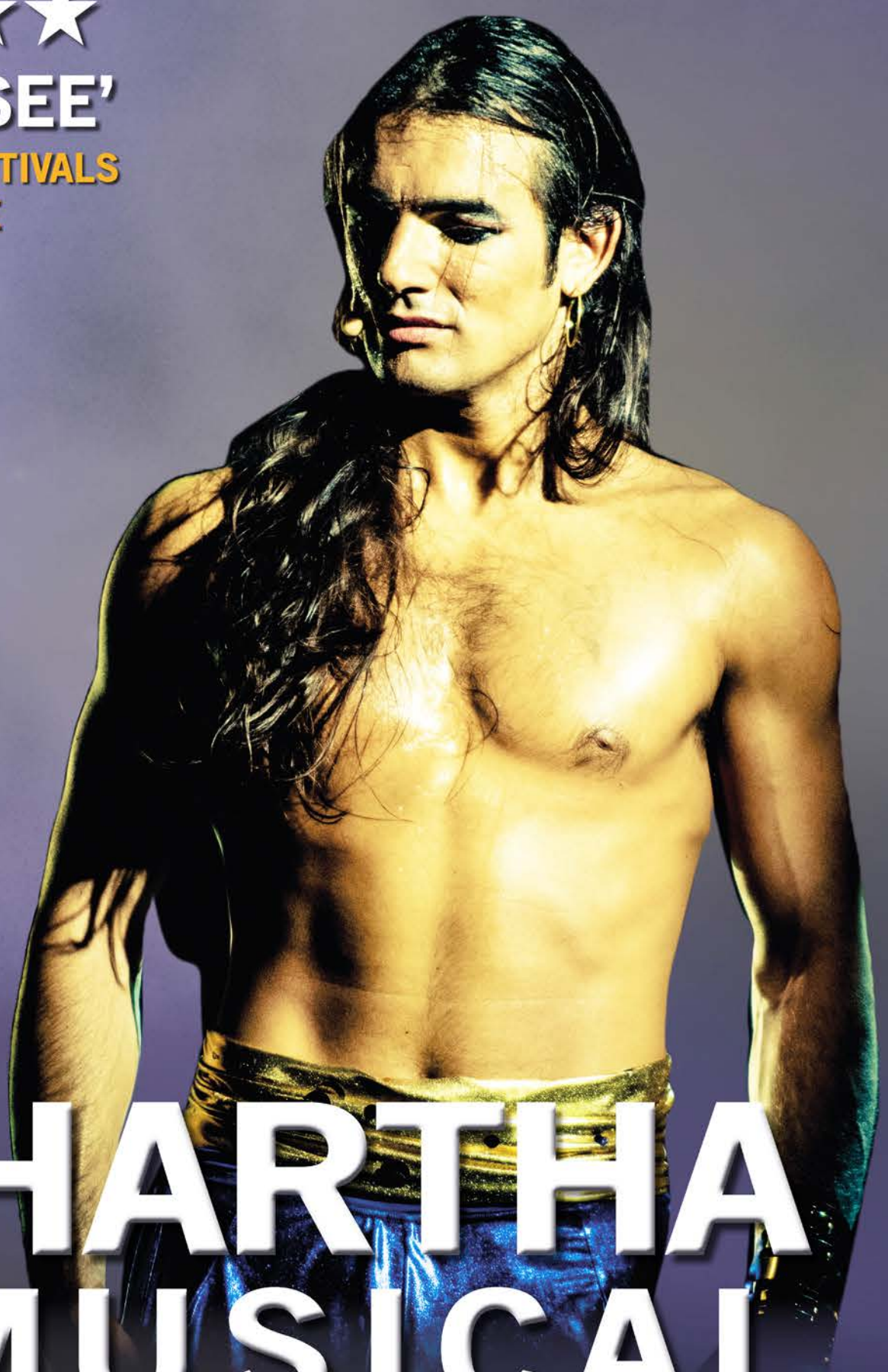
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It's the Edinburgh Fringe's awards frenzy

And so, as we approach the Fringe finale, it's time for all the awards. Because while some gongs are dished out earlier in the Festival, it is these last few days when it all gets a bit crazy in Fringe-awards-ville.

We here at ThreeWeeks will present our Editors' Awards on Saturday morning, celebrating the ten things - shows, performers, companies, initiatives - who made this year's Edinburgh Festival particularly special. Meanwhile the ThreeWeeks news team will keep you up to date on all the other prize givings as they occur at ThreeWeeks.co.uk/news

But first, we find out more about two of the awards taking place this week, a brand new competition, and an old favourite.

BrewDog Fringe Award

His Fringe programme having generated both an Edinburgh Comedy Award and two Malcolm Hardee Awards last August, Bob Slayer has decided it is he who should be handing out the prizes this year.

And somehow he's managed to find a gap in the Edinburgh awards spectrum, a prize that celebrates comedians' knowledge about all things beer. It's obvious when you think about it. Though presumably any knowledge of a certain Australian lager brand counts against contenders.

"It's the first proper award judged on proper criteria", Slayer boasted to ThreeWeeks. "And it also has a proper prize too. The winner will get the chance to brew a beer with BrewDog at Brew HQ and all the worldwide critical acclaim they could ever dream of!"

Every performer at the Fringe was invited to compete, "decent beer



credentials" the only entry requirement. And as we went

to press some top acts were already lined up to compete

for the award at a special show on 20 Aug at 3pm, including Will Hodgson, Tim FitzHigham and Phil Kay.

It's a line-up that suggests this is, in fact, an area where comics have long wished to prove their worth. "I do believe this will become the highest accolade in comedy", added Slayer. "I mean, who doesn't want their own beer?"

The competition will take place at Bob & Miss Behave's Bookshop, the Fringe venue Slayer is co-running for the second time this year, albeit in a new location. "We had a lovely shop last year, and this year we have gone even better with our lovely spot at the bottom of the Pleasance on Holyrood Rd".

"We rented an empty space, knocked down walls, pulled up floors, put some stairs into the basement, added toilets and most importantly a vibe that feels far removed from the commercial Fringe. Everyone should pop their head into the Bookshop at least once, and maybe come along for the anarchic, anything goes late night show".

Total Theatre Awards

The Total Theatre Awards are back for another Fringe, celebrating, in the programme's own words, "artists and companies presenting innovative work within devised theatre, live art, visual performance, mime, puppetry, physical theatre, experimental theatre, clown, circus, street, immersive, outdoor, site specific performance and more". It's a wide remit, though the simpler definition is in the title I guess, 'total theatre experience'.

No less than 436 shows were eligible this year, and the Total Theatre team saw each of them in the early stages of the Festival. "The assessors are looking for new ideas and examples of excellence" says awards producer Jo Crowley. "And we spend a lot of time discussing the craft and skills employed in the work, the relationship between form and content, consideration of the audience, and the rigour with which the work is made".

The assessors meet regularly to discuss the shows they have seen, eventually producing a shortlist which was announced last week. And that kickstarts a second stage of judging, with a panel charged with the task of selecting overall winners in the four categories that sit under the Total

Theatre Award umbrella.

"It's been an incredible year for shows across all four of the Total Theatre Awards categories", Awards Associate Natalie Querol says. "In addition to awards for physical and visual theatre, we also have one for innovation, experimentation and playing with form, another for emerging artist or company, and this year also the Total Theatre And Jacksons Lane Award For Circus".

Circus shows have grown in number at the Fringe in recent years, the genre being specifically name checked in the Fringe Programme for the first time in 2014. "The Total Theatre Awards have always recognised circus within its nominees and winners" says Crowley, "and over the years there has been a

proliferation of world-class circus at the Fringe".

The Awards' Associate Producer Becki Haines adds: "For 2014 we have teamed up with Jacksons Lane, widely acknowledged as the UK's leading supporter of small to mid-scale circus, to introduce The Total Theatre And Jacksons Lane Award For Circus. This will launch a critical dialogue about circus as an art form in its own right at the Fringe and will award a company or artist that is advancing the medium and helping to create new audiences for contemporary circus, from artists both at home and overseas".

This year's overall Total Theatre winners will be announced on 21 Aug. Look out for news on the winners at ThreeWeeks.co.uk/news

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CARO WRITES>

Ah, Edinburgh Festival. You've done that thing again, haven't you? You slipped by in the blink of an eye, despite the fact you were once pretty much a whole month stretching out ahead of me. Time passes faster in Edinburgh during August than it does anywhere else, and that's ancient Caro's scientific fact. Or perhaps it's just that we are all so busy, we don't have time to think, our days being filled with that endless round of show-going or show-making, working, schmoozing and drinking... well, for some of us.

But if you are involved in this monstrously large and entertaining beast, you don't stop for a moment, and it's surprising how quickly the end then comes into sight. And in sight it is. Even though, as I write this, there's a whole week of the Fringe still to go, and a full two weeks until the International Festival has its big firework finale. Which is actually quite a lot still to come, isn't it? But you know what it's like, Week Three slips by fastest of all, and by the time you read this the Fringe will be very much in its final stretch.

And Week Three always feels like the wind down week. At the start of it, everyone is tired and fighting off Fringe flu. But then, by Wednesday evening, everyone picks up speed again, because the final weekend is in sight, and an energy burst is in order. Don't waste the whole lot on too much partying and performing though, you'll need at least some of it to get that heavy suitcase down six flights of stairs to the taxi come Monday. Or whenever it is you are leaving the Festival City. Unless you live here, in which case enjoy the fireworks on the 31st.

I, like most others I suspect, am experiencing my start-of-week-three lull right now, yes, just as I write this letter. And I'm fantasising about sleeping for long periods once the Fringe has ended. They are pure fantasies, of course, because for myriad reasons I am rubbish at sleeping in, and I have a child who wouldn't allow it even if I were a world champion. But you can bet I'll be doing something really relaxing as August ends. Like scrubbing and cleaning my neglected-throughout-July-and-August home down south. Jealous? Yeah.

Anyway, enough of that, let's talk about the bounty contained in this, the final issue of ThreeWeeks for 2014.

First, we asked veteran Fringe director Damian Sandys to welcome you into our pages with his letter to Edinburgh, and then, we've got some fascinating interviews: this week we've spoken to a couple of our comedy favourites, Catriona Knox and Dan Clark, popped some questions to mash-up rock duo Rayguns Look Real Enough, and chatted with Philip Whitchurch, the man behind acclaimed Fringe play 'Shakespeare, His Wife And The Dog'. We also talked to Njo Kong Kie, the brains behind 'Picnic In The Cemetery', gentleman rhymers Mr B, and to Vladimir Shcherban from Fringe First gong winning Belarus Free Theatre.

As well as that clutch of Q&As, we've got columns from Dane Baptiste, Jason Cook and Barry Ferns, plus lots and lots of reviews, including a recap of some of the 5/5 critiques already published in the ThreeWeeks Daily, our daily bulletin to which you should all sign up in order to receive news and reviews right through to the end of the Festival month (ThreeWeeks.co.uk/signup).

I hope you enjoy reading our last issue. And I hope you enjoy sleeping and 'healthing' your way through September. I am about to start preparations for Fringe 2015. How about you? See you there! **Caro @ThreeWeeks**

PS: If you're based in London, why wait until next August for our next catch up, check us out at ThisWeekLondon.com all year round.

Letter To Edinburgh: from Damian Sandys

Director Damian Sandys isn't in Edinburgh this Festival. So he wrote this letter instead.

Dear Edinburgh,

This trial separation has been an interesting period. For thirteen years solid we have lived together each glorious summer. It's had its ups, it's had its downs. But we've always held each other up along the way. Through the sleepless nights and the permanent glaze of the eyes; through the euphoria of sell out shows and five star reviews; through that horror when five reviewers turn up to the very first preview; and through the countless hours of flyering on the Mile, watching the weather go from sun to rain to hail and back to sun, all within the space of half an hour.

Until this year. I'm still not exactly sure why but, for some inexplicable reason, my heart said we needed a break from each other. My head tried to reason with it ("It's only a phase you're going through... You'll regret it if you don't... Buck up and just get on with it") but it would not budge. No matter how much love was there, for the first time it felt like it just wasn't enough and we needed to look elsewhere for a little while, even if just to confirm that, actually, we are meant to be together.

It felt like a betrayal at first. Back in the spring, when friends started talking excitedly about their Edinburgh plans, I'd guiltily have to admit that I wasn't actually taking anything to the Fringe this year, and probably wouldn't even visit. Every time the reaction was the same. "But you have to go! You're always there!" they whispered, their faces agog with silent horror. I felt the shame but pressed on with my plan. I'd started on this slippery path towards breaking out on my own and to veer off it already would be a sign of weakness.

The months passed by and, for a brief while, I felt at peace with my decision. When the Fringe brochure was published, I avoided it at all costs under the guise of 'out of sight, out of mind'. If I pretended you didn't exist then everything was fine. It may not have been the most mature way of dealing with our separation but hey, it worked just fine. For a time.

Yet fast forward to mid-August and here I am, gazing miserably out of a London window, surrounded by newspapers and computer tabs, all lying open on pages of Edinburgh reviews, and thinking wistfully of what might have been.

Now, don't be getting all big headed and think I can't live without you. I'm not going to lie, July was actually rather

fantastic without you in my life. Rather than the usual jumping from rehearsal to rehearsal, or trying to obtain print approval after the insertion of an extra comma, I simply enjoyed myself. I saw people; I slept in, waking only to watch Jeremy Kyle; I looked at holidays abroad and realised I could actually go if I wanted to. There were no technical forms to fill in, no last minute script adaptations, no freak outs about accommodation or transport issues. Everything was calm. Everything was quiet.

And that was when I realised I missed it. I missed you. Suddenly my world was in disarray. I've been with you every summer for the whole of my adult life. Thirteen years together and I'd taken it away. I had the crushing realisation that I actually had no concept of what the rest of the world actually did in August.

All I knew was life within the Edinbubble and I had single handedly taken a pin and viciously popped it with no thought of the consequences. And now I'm scared that, having taken it away, will we ever get it back? I see now it was a rash decision. I thought I could handle it. Yes, it's given me sleep and vegetables and home cooked food. Yes, I've spent the least amount of money I ever have during a summer. Yes, I've been to the theatre and not fallen asleep once in the darkened, warm space.

But I haven't had that Edinburgh feeling; the rush of exhilaration and exhaustion as you walk out in the morning, ready for another day of the Fringe. I haven't queued in the rain whilst a show goes up late or danced with glee at getting a ticket to the big sell out show; I haven't visited the Mosque kitchen or had that moment where nothing else will do apart from a Piemaker tattie dog; or eaten every meal from a paper plate with plastic cutlery for a month.

I haven't rocked out to the pre-show music when the audiences have reached the sell-out point; I haven't proudly collected lanyards and waved them to get discounts on everything; I haven't been able to become an absolute fan boy of a show or performer

and worship them for the month from afar; I haven't seen some of the most magical, creative, beautiful productions there are; I haven't even seen the Cringe of the Fringe; I haven't declared for three weeks that I'm never going to climb Arthur's Seat again and then found myself rounding everyone up and leading the trip to catch sunrise on the final morning.

I guess, I'm trying to say I'm sorry. If it's not too late, maybe we can start again? And, no word of a lie, the day you opened I found myself making a huge plan for next year. I'm actually ready to start work on it right now. I've got making up to do, I know. But give me a chance. Don't forget me.

I know that you've probably found someone else by now, but, Edinburgh, I've realised that you are everything. You are the one place that whenever something goes wrong, it can simply be celebrated as "all part of the Fringe experience". Your beauty lies in the imperfections and I've realised that, Edinburgh, I love you just as you are. You know, if you'll have me, I could be there in four and a half hours. Just give me the word and I'll be there. Edinburgh, be mine forever.

Damian is a freelance theatre director and has directed or produced 33 productions at the Fringe since 2001, including eight years of running C theatre and 'Shakespeare For Breakfast'.



TW

TW PODCAST

Get online for the audio guide to the Fringe | ThreeWeeks.co.uk/podcasts

CtheFestival



New Theatre of Ottawa
**The Player's Advice
to Shakespeare**
30 Jul–25 Aug 7.15pm **C too**



No Prophet Theatre Company
Chatroom
30 Jul–25 Aug 8.20pm **C nova**



Here Theatre
Jestia and Raedon
30–25 Aug 3.25pm **C nova**



Elsewhere and Otherwise
Hyde & Seek
30 Jul–25 Aug 8.50pm **C**



English Cabaret with **C theatre**
**Dreams of Peace
and Freedom**
31 Jul–25 Aug 7.45pm **C south**



Straylight Australia and Bee Loud
**The Road to
Skibbereen**
10–25 Aug 2.15pm **C**



Oneoff Productions
Parade
14–24 Aug 8.10pm **C too**



John Burns
**Mallory:
Beyond Everest**
30 Jul–25 Aug 3.00pm **C nova**



Sally E Dean
**Something's in the
Living Room**
6–25 Aug 3.00pm **C cubed**



Bablake Theatre
**The Picture of
Dorian Gray**
18–23 Aug 1.30pm **C**



Unifaun Theatre Productions
Tender Napalm
10–25 Aug 4.50pm **C nova**



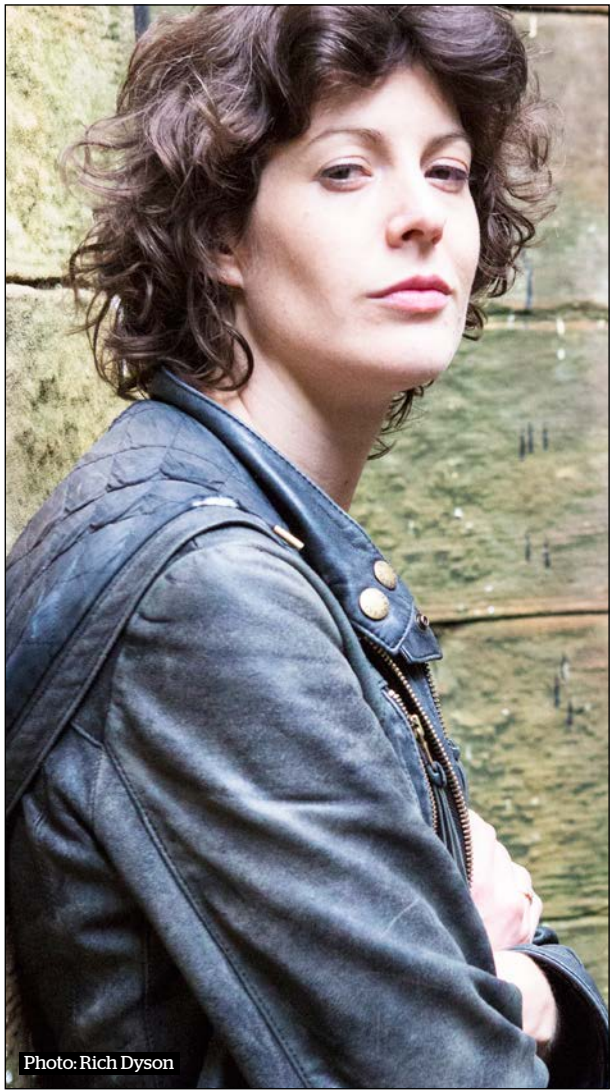
DEM Productions
Lysistrata
30 Jul–25 Aug 8.30pm **C**

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Catriona Knox



You, like us, may have first come across the super-talented Catriona Knox as one third of the rather successful sketch troupe the Boom Jennies. But she is back at the Fringe this year with an all new solo show, which garnered high praise from our reviewer, who praised her “joyful set” and “perfectly pitched creations”.

And Knox is keeping pretty busy this Festival, also appearing in a theatre piece alongside fellow comedy types Simon Munnery and Thom Tuck. We’ve heard lots of good things about Knox over the years, and felt it was high time we hurled a smattering of questions her way.

TW: Tell us about your show this year. What kind of characters can we expect?
CK: Ridiculous, high-octane, very very silly ones. This show’s definitely the most riotous one I’ve done, which is saying something, seeing as last year

I made an audience member do an entire French oral and a ballroom dance. One of my characters this year is Nick Clegg, which is fun. Trapped people full of desperation and self-loathing are always fun to play.

TW: Does each new show have all new characters or do you bring old favourites back?
CK: I always try to make the show all new, despite the fact that my mum constantly implores me to resurrect a character I did back when God was a foetus. “I don’t want to do that one Mum, it’s from ten years ago”, “well why not just do it as an encore?” “I probably won’t Mum”.

TW: Do you have a favourite character this year?
CK: The mad evangelical preacher Gaston Paul. He’s joyful. Sort of without meaning to I’ve created more male characters than female ones this year, which is ever so political of me, guys.

TW: We first saw you at the Festival as one of the Boom Jennies. Are the three of you likely to join forces again in the near future?
CK: The second series of our BBC Radio 4 show, ‘Mission

Impossible’, aired a few months ago so we’re still working on projects together. We have a lot of mutual friends so we’ll probably all get to be bridesmaids at a wedding at some point, and p’raps try out a few new sketches there.

TW: As well as doing your solo show, you are also appearing in a theatre show. Tell us about that.
CK: It’s the Pinter play ‘A Slight Ache’. It’s an intense psycho drama in which an undersexed woman and her husband murder a wasp and are undone by a balaclava clad man. All before lunchtime in a sweaty shipping container in the Pleasance courtyard. It’s pure crazy, I love it.

TW: What are Thom Tuck and Simon Munnery like to work with?
CK: They’re really smashing. Simon and I have wonderful daily chats behind the shipping container next to a bag of overflowing rubbish before we go on (we share everything from a pint of cider to concerns about vermin) and Thom manages to do the show totally brilliantly every day despite having done infinity shows the previous day and drinking all of Edinburgh dry. Simon’s an

excellent eye actor too. And if that doesn’t encourage you to see the play I don’t know what will.

TW: Is it hard to switch between theatre and comedy on a daily basis?
CK: Not as hard as I imagined it might be. The main thing has been training myself not to expect laughter in the play. It’s a really comical piece but Pinter’s not known for the belly laughs - I know, informative... you’re welcome - and because it’s theatre people often just listen. And apparently that doesn’t always mean they hate it, it might mean they actually like it.

TW: You guested on Clever Peter’s Radio 4 sketch show. Have you seen their live show here this year? Are they coping without you?
CK: I haven’t seen their show yet because I’ve essentially been a hermit, but I’m telling everyone to go because they’re brilliant and their radio show was brilliant. I should think they’re feeling my loss keenly though. It’s tough when we’re apart.

Read more from Catriona at ThreeWeeks.co.uk/catronaknox
‘Catriona Knox Thinks She’s Hard Enough’ is on at Pleasance Courtyard until 25 Aug.

TW

Vladimir Shcherban, Belarus Free Theatre

Belarus Free Theatre is a bold arts organisation, established to present ideas and issues usually denied public debate by the Belarusian dictatorial regime. Performances in Belarus must be staged in secret, its performers risking persecution from the state, and its founders forced to relocate to London for their own safety.

The company’s productions often tackle contentious and timely political issues, with their latest piece considering the treatment of the trans* community in the modern world.

And while ‘merry christmas Ms Meadows’ may have been initially inspired by the treatment of LGBTQIA people back in Belarus, the tragic death here in the UK of teacher Lucy Meadows - from whom the show’s title originates - proves that, whatever achievements have been made in countries like this, society still leaves trans* people feeling vulnerable.

We spoke to BFT’s Vladimir Shcherban to find out more...

TW: What is the premise of ‘merry christmas Ms Meadows’? What made you decide to tackle this subject matter?
VS: The show is dedicated to one of the most vulnerable and marginalised groups of people in society today - trans*. At Belarus Free Theatre we are always interested in exploring human rights, and the catastrophic situation in Belarus - with the prohibition of activism and protest, the arrest of activists and the closure of LGBTQIA social spaces - has inspired us to explore the problems experienced by LGBTQIA society.

We touched on this topic in our prize-winning show ‘Minsk 2011’, which explored sex and sexuality in Belarus and its capital Minsk. But as the situation became worse in Belarus for the LGBTQIA community, we made the decision to dedicate a whole show to this subject. We want to draw attention to these issues, and to take upon ourselves, in a way, the function of educator, to do what

state education programmes are often failing to do.
As we began our research for this project - which was nameless at the time - the news of the tragic death in Lancashire of trans* primary teacher Lucy Meadows reached us. We followed the story in the media, and in doing so began to turn our attention to the situation worldwide; we realised that such sad events take place not just in dictatorships, but also in democratic states like the UK.

TW: The piece has been built on gender studies and observations from across the world. What form did the research take?
VS: In the course of our research for the show we met with different representatives of LGBTQIA communities, not just in Belarus but also in other countries: transgender people in Malaysia, drag performers in Thailand, sex-workers in Ghana, and others. Speaking to them heightened our awareness of the extreme, global

vulnerability of trans* people, whose visibility makes them the target for violence.
And in Belarus this violence is encouraged by the government’s attitude to such communities. Lukashenko, the long-governing

president of Belarus, has on more than one occasion made negative comments about the LGBTQIA community, openly stating that he, personally, will only justify lesbians as women who “couldn’t find the real man”. It’s factors like



Dan Clark

Edinburgh veteran Dan Clark hasn't done a full run at the Fringe for seven years, and it's got to be said, we missed him. Still, we don't blame him. He's been busy, of course; distracted. Not least by work on his TV series 'How Not To Live Your Life'.

But when we heard he'd be back at the Festival this year, we were pleased, and a little surprised. And keen to find out more about his new show, why he is back at the Fringe this year, and whether or not he takes a good selfie.

TW: What is your show about this year? Does it have a specific theme?

DC: My show is mostly about having been single for almost twelve years and what it's like being a bachelor at 38. Hence the title 'Me, My Selfie and I'. Although I now wish I had named it after one of my jokes where I confess to having written a book called '12 Years A Slag'. The show is also about how I still don't feel like I'm a real grown up. When my dad was thirty eight he was a proper adult. He had three kids, a house

and a proper moustache. I'm still nowhere near getting those things. Especially the tache. And there's a little bit about death and mortality. But not in a depressing way.

TW: You put the fairly recently coined word 'selfie' in the title. We here at ThreeWeeks aren't overly fond of this neologism. Is it one that you have embraced?

DC: I don't think selfies are a modern thing on a psychological level. We just didn't have the technology to do them before. It was too much of a pain and potential money loss to do a selfie with the old film cameras. Can you imagine? Taking a picture of yourself and then saying "well I hope that turns out well in two weeks when I pick up my photos from Boots". Though in the old days of hard-copy photos, if someone gave you their snaps from a holiday you'd also been on, you'd flip through them all and only really stop and look properly at the photos you were in. We've always been self obsessed. We just couldn't do it as easily before.

TW: Do you take a good selfie?

DC: Is there a skill in it? I've taken the odd selfie yeah. Not sure if I'm good at them. I'm not great at artificially smiling in photos. So I always look moody. By the way, is a selfie with another person still

a selfie? Surely selfie means by your self?

TW: You mentioned the show includes a bit on death and mortality. But you are known for having an upbeat style. Will you be dealing with these topics in an upbeat way?

DC: I'm not interested in deliberately making an audience feel awkward. But I do like to talk about things which are personal and confessional and maybe sometimes a bit dark. But all my reviews always make a point of saying there's a warmth to my shows. So hopefully people still find the material funny and engaging, even if I talk about death and loneliness.

TW: When we spoke to you in London a year or so ago, you said you couldn't see yourself returning to the Fringe for a full run. What made you change your mind?

DC: Ha. Amazing. Can't believe you remember that. I haven't done the full run for seven years. I was last here for a short run of three nights in 2011. Yes, I did say I wouldn't do the full run ever again. What changed? Hmm. I hadn't done stand-up in quite a while. I fell out of love with it. I was literally on the verge of quitting. But I did a gig in March as a favour to a friend and it was amazing. I'd

forgotten how much I loved and missed it. I made some enquiries to The Pleasance about doing a short run but the only spaces available were for the whole month. I told myself it would be good for me to do it, as it would force me to write a proper new hour show, which I hadn't done in three years, partly due to TV stuff. And doing the full run does mean you get the show in such great shape if you wanna tour it after.

TW: How has the run been so far? Have you slipped back easily into the Fringe routine?

DC: I'm loving my shows up here so much. But it's still gruelling doing the full month. Nowhere else in the entertainment business do you feel quite as in competition with so many other things. That part bothers me. But it's an incredible festival unlike any other. Also, and probably most importantly, I don't drink like I used to. I was a bit of a party animal. I drank a lot. Now I'm home every night by 12.30am. It's making the run much easier and shows much better. Wish I'd known that in my twenties!

Read more from Dan at ThreeWeeks.co.uk/danclark
'Dan Clark: Me, My Selfie and I' is on at Pleasance Dome until 24 Aug.



TW

these that have brought us to the idea of education, and to the construction of what we are calling a 'show-encyclopedia'.

The aim of the show-encyclopedia is to introduce the audience to the latest medical and scientific research in this area with the help of the unique language of theatre, to trace how over thousands of years the knowledge of sexuality and gender has formed and transformed in different societies.

The Albanian Virgins, Hijras in India, texts of Ovid and Plato, quotes from the French philosopher Michel Foucault, statistics, medico-scientific definitions and articles from The Daily Mail - all of these became a literary base for the show. In the show these threads are intertwined with real stories of real people from different countries: people who have the courage to be who they are. The question we ask is: can contemporary society fully allow people to be themselves?

TW: It seems that you had a definite political message?

VS: Absolutely. In Belarus, each topic

you develop inevitably becomes political. By doing this show, voicing the issues and articulating the problems, we are already making a political statement. The attraction, by the means of our show, of public attention to the breaching of the human rights is a political act.

As a result of the research we conducted, we realised that the politicisation of discourse about social status, gender and sexuality in any society is unavoidable. It is easier now for British society to accept gay marriage, which is a great development and an achievement in human rights, but the situation with Ms Meadows shows that there are other questions in line... Is progressive society ready to refuse or change the gender binary in favour of gender multiplicity? The paradoxical visibility and, at the same time, invisibility of trans* people makes their integration into society or 'normalisation' very difficult. There should be no general rules of masculinity or femininity; the human is an individual, a personality, and has to be treated as one.

For us it's a personal show that we dedicate to our loved ones and friends who suffered discrimination, those who died as a result of violence, and to all of those who paid a dear price for their right to be themselves. And we are not just observers when it comes to these issues. 50% of the people in our company identify as LGBTQIA, so this show is a dedication and an education at the same time.

TW: What will happen to the show after Edinburgh? Do you have plans to tour?

VS: We are hoping that 'Ms Meadows' will have a great future. BFT is an ensemble of actors who have worked together for nine years now and 2015 is a very important year for us: the tenth anniversary of our company. They have not been easy, but these last ten years have been fully loaded creatively; the richest years of our lives. We have a dream to tour worldwide to celebrate our milestone. I really hope that we will do this, and no dictatorship, political or financial, will stop us from doing so.

Read more from Vladimir at ThreeWeeks.co.uk/belarusfreetheatre
'merry christmas, Ms Meadows' is on at Pleasance Dome until 25 Aug.

some News

"correction"

"When good news goes bad."

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Heading for the Hall Of Fame? Rayguns Look Real Enough

TW INTERVIEWS

Rayguns Look Real Enough are back in Edinburgh with their unique blend of mash-up rock and tiger suits (well, just the one tiger suit in fact).

And this time they're heading to the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame. Maybe. Well, they've definitely named their show 'Hall Of Fame'.

ThreeWeeks found the band's stars Ray Gun and Luke Reel at the bar and asked them some quick questions.

TW: So let's begin at the beginning. How did Rayguns Look Real Enough form?

Luke: I lost my cat and put up posters with my number on. Ray was the only reply.

Ray: I was hungry. And I know how to sing for my supper.

TW: Musically speaking, what do you get? Who are your influences?

Luke: Anything and everything. He hums it. I play it.

Ray: If you listen closely to our show, you may notice a Michael Jackson theme.

Luke: Though not entirely intentional. Personally I'd like more Metallica.

Ray: Never gonna happen.

TW: You call yourself a mash-up rock band. How do you go about putting your songs together? What's the process?

Ray: As a rule, we like to sit in the sunshine, open a few beers and then annoy the neighbours.

Luke: Annoy? They get a free fricking gig!

Ray: Oh yeah. You're right. I'll pop an invoice in their letterbox when we get back.

TW: What's your best ever mash-up combination?

Ray: It has to be Alanis Morissette's 'You Oughta Know' with PJ and Duncan's 'Let's Get Ready To Rumble'.

Luke: Turns out that Ant and Dec really help accentuate the pain that Alanis felt at the time...Psych!

TW: What happens in 'Hall of Fame'?

Luke: It highlights our struggle to achieve the infamy we rightly deserve.

Ray: And I get to grind my crotch in women's faces.

TW: Is it really the voice of Lionel Blair that we hear?

Luke: Yeah. He was riding the 'Celebrity Big Brother' wave and thought that being involved with the Rayguns would further his career.

Ray: Let's face it, he needed the boost.

TW: You say your bid for rock infamy features throughout the

show. Any tips for how we could achieve rock infamy?

Ray: I have a detailed manual in my dressing room. You should come and take a look after this interview is over...

Luke: I also have a vibrating sofa.

Ray: He has back problems.

Luke: Having a good figure is very important. My work-out regime is a closely guarded secret.

Ray: Deep fried haggis is not what I'd call a secret. My tip is to learn to appreciate black clothes.

TW: How are Fringe audiences reacting to the show? What keeps you coming back to the Festival?

Luke: They're reacting superbly. Quite humbling in fact. It makes my guy-liner run.

Ray: They're the reason we come back... them and the Cheesee Peasee Cheese Van.

Luke: Is that another "closely guarded secret"?

Ray: I makes me want to comté back to the Festival.

Luke: *face palms*

TW: There are fewer music types here this Festival. How would you persuade other rock stars to come to the Fringe? Who would you like to see performing here?

Ray: I would love to see Top Cat dressed as Tony The Tiger Sings Tiger Feet... at Tiger Tiger.

Luke: Oh God.

Ray: On a split bill with Bill Murray reads Garfield Live!

Luke: My dream is to see Morrissey do a one man show 'My Crying Falafel', in a Yurt

Ray: I. Would. Hate. That.

Luke: Uncultured swine!

Hall of Fame, The Voodoo Rooms, until 24 Aug

TW

TW

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TW REVIEWS

The Irrational Fears Of Rillettes (Harriet Kemsley / Free Festival)

With BBC3 appearances and a Brighton Fringe New Act award, Harriet Kemsley is something of a rising star and, as she quips herself, "one to watch (out for)". A personable comic, she easily gets the room on her side, particularly after slamming down a heckler with true aplomb. Kemsley has a knack of pondering her own punchlines, as though disturbed by the darker thoughts that occasionally slip out, while at the same time looking surprised and delighted when her jokes get a laugh. It's an endearingly self-conscious style, which only falters when she rushes her delivery and it becomes hard to catch the words. Nerves and performing skills can be honed though, and it's clear that Harriet Kemsley has potential for many Fringes to come.

Laughing Horse @ The Counting House, until 24 Aug.
tw rating 3/5 | [Laura Gavin]

Natasia Demetriou: You'll Never Have All Of Me (The Invisible Dot Ltd)

They may appear flip and asinine, but Natasia Demetriou's characters - some live and some pre-recorded - hide a deeper point: the silly accents and synthetic wigs subtly deconstructing bad character comedy, asking what makes it funny and constantly drawing attention to our laughter. The characters and script only work because they are delivered by her; in the mouth of anyone else this material would fail. Sometimes it's the premise and sometimes the delivery that makes each character so funny, but all are united by Demetriou's supreme ability for titting about, barely hiding a faint smile that shows she knows how ridiculous this all is. And it is ridiculous in the extreme, but joyously, exuberantly enjoyable too.

Underbelly Cowgate, until 24 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Tim Bano]

Paul Ricketts' West End Story (Comedy Verity)

If there is one lesson to be learned from Paul Ricketts' show it's this: treat every day as if it's your birthday. You could wind up at a flamenco party, or simply get a free drink. In 'West End Story', Ricketts ponders the life of a comedian, discusses pornography and talks about the type of person you usually encounter in London, and the ones you usually don't... unless you take his advice and remain open to possibility, seize every opportunity and keep

on pretending it's your special day. Ricketts is a wonderful impersonator, easily creating vivid pictures and making the stories come to life in front of you. This is storytelling comedy with real heart; go hear his story.

Just The Tonic @ The Mash House until 24 Aug. tw rating 4/5 | [Keara Barnes]

Simon Feilder: All The Things I'm Not (Simon Feilder)

With the right audience, or perhaps just a slightly larger one, this show would be twice as enjoyable, and yet it's already pretty good. Simon Feilder has put together an extremely slick, well-oiled routine with some impressively creative ideas and he's clearly desperate to make this a success. Despite the lack of traditional stand-up material, Feilder's meticulous preparation, self-awareness and raw enthusiasm still provides the laughs. For all its positives though, this is a performance yet to find its niche, leaving some audience members amused, if a little puzzled. If you're a fan of comedy but also yearn for more of an introspective, chaotic journey through the mind of a self confessed man-child, then this is the ideal show for you.

Pleasance Courtyard, until 25 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [David O'Connor]

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

It's nice when something's just nice, isn't it? This is a nice show. In lieu of a 'proper' discursive relationship, soft, creative Aidan and his Navy dad went to see lots of films. In this show, he constructs a narrative around ten of them, from John Wayne through 'Star Trek', 'Escape To Victory' and 'Avatar'. The rights to film clips are expensive, so instead there are some short filmed scenes in which Kimble, Aidan's dog, takes on various roles, including the shark from 'Jaws'. It's every bit as twee as it sounds, as his love for both his subjects genuinely shines through. As for the heartwarming final story about the Blues Brothers, well now, that really is nice.

Voodoo Rooms, until 24 Aug.
tw rating 3/5 | [Bruce Blacklaw]

Anil Desai's Late Night At The Movies (Anil Desai / Free Festival)

Anil Desai was in love with the movies from an early age. That love soon became an obsession, as he watched the legends of the silver screen and, soon after, learned to impersonate them. He reels through his catalogue of impressions with a pinpoint accuracy - some of them are so perfect that it's hard to believe the physical transformation

5/5 SHOW



Photo: Rich Hardcastle

Tim FitzHigham - Hellfire (Brett Vincent for Get Comedy / PBJ Management)

History and comedy seem to have been a popular double act at the Fringe of recent years, but this show takes it to another level. 'Hellfire' is an eccentric and passionate look into one of the world's most secret societies, nicely rounded out by Tim FitzHigham's own frenetic style of stand-up. The show was not only hilarious, but incredibly intriguing too; it's a feat that seems effortlessly achieved via the anecdotes of this veteran adventurer. His honest enthusiasm for the subject, and the energy he exudes as he bounces around the stage were a delight to witness. As the full-bellied laughs rang out, there wasn't an audience member that left without a grin across their face. A truly entertaining show that may teach you something too!

Pleasance Dome, until 25 Aug. tw rating 5/5 | [Bethan Highgate-Betts]

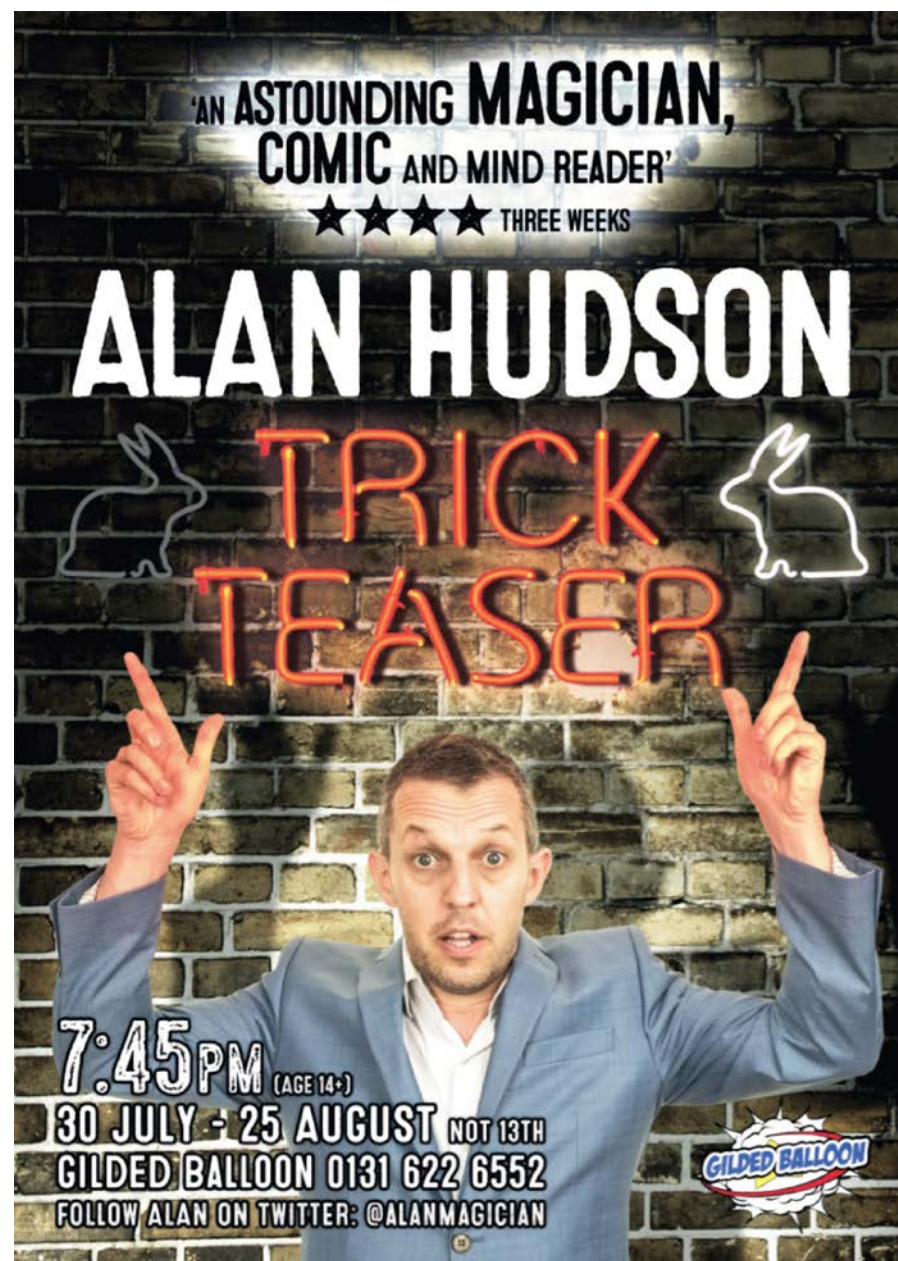
taking place on stage. The show occasionally dips into his personal life, helping to break up what would otherwise be just a solid hour of impressions, though the show is at its best when Desai incorporates his characters into the narrative. Best suited for fans of quickfire comedy who enjoy the art of impressions.

Laughing Horse @ City Cafe, until 24th Aug. tw rating 3/5 | [James McColl]

Aye Right? How No?: The Comedy Countdown To The Referendum With Vladimir McTavish & Keir McAllister (Vladimir McTavish & Keir McAllister)

McTavish and McAllister were ahead of the game by doing a comedy show about the referendum in 2012. This year, now that more people are talking (and joking!) about it all, they're back with this updated version, condensed to allow room for special guests (Rory Bremner with some good stuff tonight). And good for them - a mature democracy should be able to laugh at whatever aspects of itself seem, well, funny. It needn't be a mature laugh, mind: leaving aside the question of whether fat jokes are acceptable in general, why shouldn't they be about the First Minister? I should probably add for balance that the No campaign gets a considerably firmer attack but, most importantly, it's mostly funny.

Assembly Rooms, until 24 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Bruce Blacklaw]



TW



5/5 SHOW

The Comedian And His Future Wife (Ola / Free Festival)

Ola wants two things from his life: to be the greatest comedian there ever was, and to find a wife. Full of laughs, this heart-warming show takes us on a journey through some of Ola’s past relationships, looking at what went wrong and what he’s learned from these experiences. Hilarious anecdotes and observations propel the show along and the hour flies by. A ‘nice guy’ comedian, Ola doesn’t single out audience members to make a joke out of them. Instead, he seems genuinely interested in their stories and relating them back to his own life. A brilliant, truly enjoyable show. From what I’ve seen, it seems like he’s already well on his way to accomplishing his first goal.

Laughing Horse @ Espionage, until 24 Aug. tw rating 5/5 | [Bethan Highgate-Betts]

Carl Donnelly: Now That’s What I
Carl Donnelly Vol 6 (Avalon Promotions Ltd)

Carl Donnelly has been on a voyage of self-discovery since last year and, naturally enough, he’s here to tell us about it. An engaging series of stories ensues: from travels in India, laser eye surgery and Peruvian spirit tea to the sometimes unfortunate consequences of “vicaring” (a word comics apparently use to mean picking up fans for post-gig sex). His set is peppered with good gags and entertaining tangents, though he could stand to lose the habit of over-egging forthcoming punchlines; “and then he said to me literally the funniest thing anyone’s ever said”. Now, it did turn out to be a pretty funny thing they said, but perhaps best let the audience be the judge of that. Otherwise, an accomplished and entertaining performance.

Pleasance Courtyard until 23 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Bruce Blacklaw]

The Church Of Zirconium
(FUNT in association with 1945 Productions)

The satirical fish in the barrel here are those cults, where the gullible faithful pay top dollar to level up their worshipfulness. Here, two gullible losers are joined by another, whose ex comes to rescue him from the clutches of the cult before end of the world. Hilarity fitfully ensues, though I still can’t decide whether to doff my cap to the writer or clout them with it for a particular soundalike gag which proves central to the resolution of the show. Not terribly subtle, the satire is mostly laid on with a clunky trowel. ‘The Church Of Zirconium’ doesn’t really develop far beyond a half decent extended sketch, though there are laughs along the way and enjoyable performances all round.

Just The Tonic at The Caves, until 24 Aug.
tw rating 3/5 | [Bruce Blacklaw]

Demi Lardner: Birds With
Human Lips (Demi Lardner)

At 20 years of age, Demi Lardner already has a couple of comedy awards from her native Australia under her belt, and she conducts herself on stage like she was born to it. Calling her quirky really wouldn’t do her justice; part stand-up, part surreal introspective, there’s nothing ordinary about Lardner’s routine. This becomes apparent the moment you spy the cardboard tapir in the room and she introduces herself in the guise of a moustachioed ghost magician. From here, the comedian gives us a glimpse into her psyche through a series of frustrating phone chats with her dad, some life-coaching from the aforementioned tapir and a few hilarious encounters with a sinister feathered nemesis. Even her observational material has touches of Eddie Izzard-esque absurdity. Brilliant fun.

Gilded Balloon, until 25 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Laura Gavin]

A Question for Three: Gein’s Family Giftshop

What gift would you take home (for yourself or a loved one) from the Edinburgh Festival Fringe?

Jim: I would take home the gift of health. The food I have eaten since being here has mostly come from the back of a van. Burgers, bratwurst, wraps, tattt dogs, and living above a fried chicken shop for the month are massively detrimental to my heart’s well being. So are the two pints per show. When I get home I intend to do what I did last year. Eat nothing but lettuce, drink nothing but water, and go to bed at a reasonable hour for at least a month. That way I can get back my old levels of fitness and continue evading the po-po.

Ed: I would take the gift of a working penis. By the end of the festival I will have shown my flaccid penis to over 1000 people (as part of the show you understand). That will have increased the overall number drastically from five and a half (one saw it with her hands) to 1005.5 or, if the last weekend goes well, 1006. The issue I have with this much exposure is that I can no longer feel anything down there, it has become just another prop that I have to take home and wash, ready for the next show.

Kath: As the woman of the group, I’d bring back the bubonic plague that lies in wait in the tunnels under the city, and in some of the free show venues. Sure, it’s deadly; sure it’s likely to wipe out large swathes of humanity; but I’m willing to take a hit on a few aunties and uncles if it diminishes some rival sketch group. It makes sense because we’re the perfect post apocalyptic sketch group, we can live off scrap metal and number plates like sharks. Also, a mini set of bagpipes on a magnet for my parents.

‘Gein’s Family Giftshop: Volume 1’ is co-written by Kiri Pritchard McLean, and is on at Pleasance Courtyard until 24 Aug.



Photo: Drew Forsyth

Four Screws Loose In The Big Screw Up (James Grant Comedy)

Four guys, a lot of wigs and a brilliant soundtrack: this is the sketch show to end all sketch shows. The Four Screws are full of energy, whimsy and disturbingly accurate impersonations of pop cult celebrities, and their charisma and camaraderie engages the audience from the second they jump into the spotlight. As the troupe make a mockery of traditional stories, popular music and even Jeremy Kyle, no one can help but be charmed and delighted by these (in their own words) screw ups. You will be hard-pressed to find another comedy troupe at the Fringe who can make an audience feel quite so in on the joke, and yet so pleasantly surprised. A laugh-a-minute sketch show with heart, hilarity and brilliant imagination.

Assembly George Square, until 25 Aug.
tw rating 5/5 | [Vicki Baron]

**5/5 SHOW****Jason Cook celebrates broken flyerers****TW COLUMNS**

Veteran Edinburgh type Jason Cook - Clatterschenkfiaternmaus alumnus and creator of TV's 'Hebburn' - back this year with his latest show 'Broken', surveys the desolate Fringe landscape for one particular type of downtrodden participant...

And so, we have crested the mountain of the Festival and are happily skiing down the other side to the last weekend, boozes, fond farewells, optimism for next year and the uplifting feeling of a Festival well done.

But not for all of us. For some, their feet are still stuck fairly and squarely in the trenches of the marketing warfare of Fringe 2014. And by this, of course, we mean the flyerers. Those poor souls whose daily agenda lists only one item: hand out bits of paper to people who don't want them, showing pictures of people who don't appreciate you.

Because the Fringe flyerer's lot is a bad one; the buoyant momentum they must sustain for a whole day, as they see the smiling faces of festival-goers going to or coming from another wonderful show. Smiling until they make eye contact with our poor flyerer. That is when faces fall, derision appears and you can see the flyer-ee looking for excuses to refuse the promotional gift.

And it has broken some. The emptiness behind the eyes has begun, the contempt for human beings as they file past, day-by-day, acting as if the flyerer does not even exist.

And that has to take its toll. Surely it is only a matter of time before a flyerer-created killing spree engulfs the Fringe, ending with a pile of bodies and a member of the offending promotional team standing atop it in a coloured hoodie screaming: "Two for fucking one is it!"

Though, even worse than a broken flyerer, this Festival has seen the rise of the 'Flyer Stalker'. Broken comedians spying on their own flyer team "to make sure they are doing their job". I have heard half a dozen comics talking about stalking their own promotional teams and stating, with some vitriol, the tasks that the spied upon poor mite was undertaking rather than handing out one of the several thousand 'ego-pamphlets' that form their day.

"He was just standing there, texting".

"Having a cup of tea, can you believe it?"

"Giving a man mouth to mouth resuscitation" Ok, the last one may have been made up, but it does beg the question: how healthy is this behaviour? And how productive?

My approach has always been to try and be as nice as possible to those selling my show, buy them sweets, voice your appreciation and generally show them that no matter how shitty things are getting, they are appreciated.

So, with that in mind, your job today, dear reader is simple: Hug a flyerer. It will make their day and lift their spirits. And you KNOW it'll annoy whoever is stalking them! "...and they were just standing there, accepting kindness from a stranger...!"

Pictured: Jason Cook and his flyerer friends.

'Jason Cook: Broken' is on at Pleasance Dome until 24 Aug.

TW

Rachel Lincoln's

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Surreal Sex Ed

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TW RATINGS**1/5 BAD****2/5 MEDIOCRE****3/5 GOOD****4/5 RECOMMENDED****5/5 HIGHLY RECOMMENDED**



Standing out in the Festival crowd:
Barry Ferns recalls top Fringe stunts

TW COLUMNS

Creativity is bursting from the seams of Edinburgh over the Festival, it's everywhere. And not just on stage, it's also in the PR and marketing of hundreds of shows.

We comedians will go as far as it takes to get noticed at the biggest arts festival of the world and I've pulled quite a few stunts in my time at Edinburgh, from performing the first show on top of Arthurs Seat, to doing a sketch show with pensioners in it, to changing my name to Lionel Richie by deed poll, to making up entirely fake reviews of my show. But performers have been at it from the very beginning - and here's a top 10 of those stunts for the uninitiated:

10. The First Stunt. In the 1960's one sketch group actually pushed a number of naked men and women down Princes Street in a fleet of wheelbarrows. They got a crowd. They got publicity. They also got arrested. It was the 60s though, surely everyone was doing it?

9. The Accidental Stunt. For use in his landmark show 'Thus Spake Zarathustra' Simon Munnery painted a mini cooper Gold and drove it all the way up to Edinburgh from London

to use in the show. When he arrived, however, he found that it didn't fit through the doors of the venue. Doh! Still it made a great story...

8. The Loss Making Stunt. In 2011 Nathan Cassidy offered £1 to every person who attended his Free Fringe show. He swears that (somehow) he didn't lose money doing it.

7. The Schoolboy Stunt. In 2012 Knut and the Gang began sticking penis stickers on rivals posters. They stood out a mile, and got a lot of (angry) attention. When threatened with legal action, they issued this statement "I apologise if one of my cocks got up anyone's nose"

6. The Relevant Stunt. Two years ago, Jim Smallman got his show title 'Tatooligan' tattooed on his stomach. That is certainly commitment.

5. The No-option Stunt. In 1986 comedian Martin Soan was camping in a tent, with his wife and their new baby, outside the back of The Pleasance. One morning they awoke to camera crews and photographers. Apparently his family were part of "The new artistic underclass" and became instant Fringe heroes.

4. The Brass Neck Stunt. Pondering how to get audience for their shows, Arthur Smith and Malcolm Hardee wrote themselves a glowing review

under the name of a notorious reviewer, and Arthur managed to drop it into the "To Publish" tray at The Scotsman newspaper. It was published the next day and their shows were instantly sold out. Genius.

3. The Nationally Reported Stunt. In 2003, Aaron Barschak gate crashed Prince William's 21st Birthday dressed as Osama Bin Laden. His show sold out that Festival, but Aaron was never heard from again (!)

2. The Political Stunt. In 2013 Gareth Morinan's publicity stunt of listing his own show 12 times in the festival programme made a Fringe Board Member resign in protest - thus inadvertently giving Gareth even more publicity. That board member certainly thought that through.

1. The Hilarious And Spontaneous Stunt. When he got into a dispute with another performer, Malcom Hardee didn't complain, no, he just waited until his rival's show had started and then (along with the audience from his own show) drove naked on a Tractor through that performers show, ruining it, and thus making it legendary in the exact same moment.

'The Barry Experience' is on at Laughing Horse @ Espionage until 24 Aug.

5/5 SHOWS

Beta Males - Happenstance (Ditto Productions)

'Happenstance' starts off well enough, providing a few chuckles here and there. But it's when the show accelerates into fifth gear that it becomes something really quite special. As the minutes and the sketches pass, the jokes become more frequent, more subtle and somehow more obvious at the same time. The Beta Males craft an entire comedy world together, and the chemistry between them makes even the less hilarious sketches worth watching. Between their attention to detail and pure physical exertion, the guys must be exhausted after each show, and deserved every second they overran (apparently they overrun a lot!). 'Happenstance' is a show that has it all: music, hunting humans, comedy and, of course, farce in spades.

Pleasance Courtyard, until 25 Aug. tw rating 5/5 | [David O'Connor]



Photo: Steve Ullathorne

Lights! Camera! Improvise!
The Improvised Movie (Mischief Theatre)

Nothing has a right to be this good. Mischief Theatre return with their hilarious improvised movies, a concept so simple and well-executed that it defies imitation, even in the only city in the world currently housing more improv groups than people. The troupe appear to possess some form of telepathy, responding fluidly and expertly to the audience's suggested movie (we plumped for a rom-com set in a zoo). The host, "Oscar", is in absolute command of the proceedings, and gleefully needles his cast whenever they do something ridiculous (which happens a lot). Mischief Theatre are at the absolute top of their game: the only reason not to see this is if you are some kind of genetic aberration that hates laughing.

Pleasance Courtyard, until 24 Aug. tw rating 5/5 | [Jon Stapley]



Photo: Joanna Mlynarska

Rob Deering: Music Face (CKP)

Rob Deering opens with an attempt to transport us from George Street to Woodstock. It takes some cajoling but, before long, a competent wolf whistler has been identified, the audience is clapping along and things start coming together nicely. Using a loop pedal to build layers of tracks, he takes us through some personal music history, including “bleepy dance music” - good for raves back in the day, good for running now (the running is for Parkinson's research - look up his justgiving page for more). His knowledge, skill and love for music really comes across, with plenty of laughs before a finale involving bubbles, bongos and a remote control helicopter. You won't get that on George Street at any other time of year.

Assembly Rooms, until 24 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Bruce Blacklaw]

Short & Curly - Who Dunnit? (Short & Curly / PBH's Free Fringe)

With this murder mystery of sorts, Short & Curly present a comedy show that makes a detective out of the audience: we get to look back at the lives of each of the suspects, so we can decide 'Who Dunnit?' All the characters are played by the comedy duo, who implement quick changes and even quicker wit. The sketches are well written and excellently executed, and the pair create characters who are all entertaining to watch. There were some issues with timing, making the show feel a bit rushed, but this is understandably a risk you take with so much audience participation. Overall, it was extremely entertaining and very funny - it's worth a watch for the wigs alone!

Ciao Roma, until 23 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Bethan Highgate-Betts]

5/5 SHOW

Steen Raskopoulos: I'm Wearing Two Suits Because I Mean Business (Underbelly Productions)

Steen Raskopoulos' concentrated shots of character and sketch comedy, with lots of improv thrown in, challenge the audience not to like him. Scenes veer between observation, absurdity and tragedy and he has a sharp knack for plunging the audience into recognisable situations, then twisting them into something funny. Steen has complete faith in his audience and the show is carefully crafted to make audience participation work without being demeaning. It's facial expressions and subtle gestures that help him become his characters - not costume changes. It's in the nuance, not the overt. With songs and dances, this is a tight and clever one man variety show, sheer fun and buzzing with ideas, none of which feel remotely stale.

Underbelly Bristo Square, until 25 Aug.
tw rating 5/5 | [Tim Bano]



Tedfest (Tedfest)

A four day festival on Inishmore to celebrate 'Father Ted' has become a cult hit, and it has now expanded with a show at the Fringe. Sadly, there is very little of Father Ted left in it, instead relying heavily on its own in-jokes. Between incomprehensible rambles by 'Father' Joe Dolan there are various acts: a stand-up comedy competition (including an off-key joke about turning gay people straight), a lovely girls competition and an excellent turn from magicians Morgan and West. Shambolic disorder reigns, however, and there are many painfully dull moments. Overall, it seems like the warm heart of 'Father Ted' has been ripped out, to be replaced by raucous pandering to a soused crowd.

Underbelly Cowgate, until 24 Aug.
tw rating 2/5 | [Tim Bano]

The Thinking Drinker's Guide To The Legends Of Liquor (Ben McFarland and Tom Sandham)

A show about booze, featuring free booze. What's not to like? The audience tastes samples of beer, gin, vodka, bourbon and tequila while learning about the elbow-bending antics of the Ancient Greeks, Peter the Great, FD Roosevelt and, memorably for several reasons, Andre the Giant. They're small samples, mind: “drink less, drink better” is the Thinking Drinkers' admirable motto. Their accompanying stand-up “infotainment” is by turns fascinating and funny, if occasionally puerile. If learning that TS Elliot's cat was called Noilly Prat pleases you, and you can handle “Putin's a cunt” as a punchline (French rather than Russian vodka is served by way of political protest), then you best get along and join the ranks of the thinking drinker.

Famous Spiegeltent, until 25 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Bruce Blacklaw]

Ten things to do at the Fringe when you're dead (that is, you died on stage)

TW COLUMNS

So every comedian's been there. The night you died on stage. But you know what, you can survive it. You will survive it. And Dane Baptiste has some tips for doing just that.

1. Drink

This is the other great comedian pastime of course, other than doing gigs in a converted butcher shop for a room full of fruitarians and vegans. You've died, now have fun and embalm yourself.

2. Eat

Recharge and carb load, it's a marathon not a race up here. Edinburgh accommodates both all types of comedy and all the comfort/ binge eating you could imagine. You can famously have everything deep-fried here. Pizza, Mar Bars, your dignity. Stuff your face, and then why not wash those trans-fats down with some alcohol, because you could use it.

3. Gig!

Usually you have to wait at least a day, maybe a week, to regain your confidence on the normal circuit; here, you can get back on the horse within the hour. No-one would ever know that you've died, as you can get back on stage before rigor mortis sets in on that material. Try to revive it straight away, maybe the Portuguese Girl Scouts at the hostel gig weren't the target audiences for that bit after all.

4. Remember the terrain

This beautiful historic city is a great tourist destination, but also serves the fattiest snacks I've ever known and alcohol all day long, all in an area that boasts the most hills I've ever seen. After travelling up and down these hills, audiences might not be up for it! Don't worry if you get a crowd that seem to be just gawking, they're probably just getting their breath back.

5. Walk it off

Edinburgh is a nice city full of interesting characters. Observe them all and they could possibly be part of a newer, more socially aware piece of material. Also have a look around some of those dark alleyways. There are plenty of secluded spots for a recently deceased comedian to self-medicate, meltdown or cry in the foetal position. Those other people in the alley, they were comedians, just like you.

6. Suck it up

Remember that this is comedy boot camp, and you're in the shit now,

marine! There will be no sympathy here, not in the comedy equivalent of Vietnam (by which, I mean, some amazing art will be created by people detailing their experiences here, but some people will just go crazy, and others will go home but leave a part of themselves behind). That's how it works, love it! Semper fi.

from every show that you do. Maybe use those death throes to allow your comedy life to flash before your eyes. Maybe you've always known you would die this way; do it with dignity. Who wants to live forever on stage? All of us, but then we'd have to be robots competing against other robots, and I think 'Robot Wars' is already a thing.



7. Forget

You are in a place where drinking happens all day long and you know what audience-plus-alcohol equals for comedians - a shit time. Why should they have all the fun? Maybe you could use a drink. Let's drown that pain in booze until you don't even remember the gig. Perfect!

8. Drink

No? Fine, I'll have one in your honour; I know I've had a tough time here. No, I DON'T have a problem, I just died, and now I'm toasting my death and all of my comrades that have died before me.

9. Learn

Even in the biggest international comedy and arts festival, a gig is still a gig, and you can get something

10. Laugh

Because it's a comedy festival, and you've bankrupted yourself to come up here. You've been living on a diet of tobacco, alcohol and pizza, and have regressed to the lifestyle of a student at Fresher's Week with that first instalment of the loan. All your other horny comedy friends are up here doing the same thing, add to the mix the finest in narcotics (I don't know nothing about nothing, police) and really, death was inevitable. Better it be on stage, where you know you can recover. If all the fun was off stage, you probably wouldn't last longer than the month!

'Dane Baptiste: Citizen Dane' is on at Pleasance Courtyard until 24 Aug.

Philip Whitchurch: Re-imagining the Bard



If you've so much as walked past your television set in the last couple of decades, you will surely recognise Philip Whitchurch from his extensive work on such programmes as 'The Bill', 'Wire In The Blood', 'Holby City' and 'My Hero'.

What you might not know is that Whitchurch is also an accomplished playwright, and this summer he has come to the Fringe not only to present a play, but to appear in it too, alongside his wife Sally Edwards. 'Shakespeare, His Wife And The Dog' has garnered great reviews, not least from our own ThreeWeeks reviewer. We spoke to Philip to find out more about what inspired him to write a show featuring the bard.

TW INTERVIEW

TW: What is the premise of the play? What happens in it?

PW: So much is written about Shakespeare and yet so little is known about him other than his work. Everyone assumes he retired a rich and successful playwright, but how does an artist simply stop working? I decided to turn the assumption on its head so... Shakespeare has retired to Stratford and, yes he is rich and successful, but he is not happy. Why? All that money and fame? Why can't he sleep? Who is he waiting for? Why can't his wife Anne find their dog? A sleepless night in Stratford. The lies, secrets and resentments of a marriage laid bare.

TW: Where did the idea for the show come from?

PW: I had this idea about doing a one man show about Shakespeare set the night before he died. It would be about the man looking back on his life and would include all my favourite bits of Shakespeare, including bits from the parts I would never get cast in! I wrote the first twenty pages and showed it to my wife and asked her opinion. Her only response was, "where's my part?" So, it became a two hander. If I'm honest, one person shows are difficult to pull off. The only dynamic is with

yourself and/or the audience. It's more fun being on stage with someone else.

TW: So the idea of performing the piece with Sally was there pretty much from the off?

PW: Yes, I always intended to do this show with Sally. We've been married for twenty two years - not quite as long as Will and Anne - but we'd never worked together. She's such a fine actress and I wanted to create something we could do together.

TW: What's it like working together on this, especially when you're playing a couple?

PW: Working with your partner? Not always easy - in fact quite tense at times - but we managed to leave most of the disagreements in the rehearsal room. I have huge respect for her instincts and opinions.

TW: You borrow some of the lines from Shakespeare, don't you? How did you select them? Is there method in it...?

PW: I was interested in the relationship an artist has with the work and a private life. I became intrigued by the idea that Shakespeare's work was autobiographical. Steinbeck's great novel 'East Of Eden' is in fact a fictional imagining of his own family history, so I wrote about a man who plundered his private life and experiences and put them into his plays. As an artist he is so steeped in his work he cannot separate it from his real life and this drives his wife to distraction. She is furious to see their private life made public. Once I had settled on a storyline, quotes and clips from the plays happened organically.

TW: You've written quite a bit in the past. How does writing and acting compare? Have you performed one of your own plays before?

PW: Yes, I've always written. My first commissioned play was at the Liverpool Everyman back in 1984. Since then I've had my plays performed at various theatres in the UK including a soul musical - 'In The Midnight Hour'. I like telling stories and that's what actors and writers try to do. This is the first time I've ever performed in my own work and I wasn't sure if I'd enjoy it but I've had a great time!

TW: Have you performed in many Shakespeare plays? What's your favourite Shakespearean role?

PW: Actually I haven't done a huge amount of Shakespeare. I love the plays but many of the parts I wanted never came around, so I got

on with other stuff. My favourite role though was Iago in 'Othello'. One of the great parts and I was lucky enough to be directed by the fabulous Michael Boyd. Villains are great fun.

TW: How does playing the man himself compare...?

PW: Playing the man himself? What I wanted to portray was a husband who just happened to write plays - but it had to work on several levels. People who like Shakespeare can enjoy the verse but basically it's about the mess of a long marriage, warts and all.

TW: Do you think people need to be a bard-aficionado to enjoy the play?

PW: No, as I said, it's really a play about two people locked in a long and not always happy marriage. Jealousy, resentment, betrayal, laughter and madness! - it's all there. The comedy and the tragedy. That's why Shakespeare is so modern, so timeless. People who love Shakespeare can enjoy spotting the quotes but some of them are quite well disguised. There are also some hidden allusions to other writers as well, but you will have to come and see the play if you want to spot them.

TW: You are well known for your TV and film work. How does it compare to live performance?

PW: I love film and TV work, but if I'm honest my best times have been in theatre. Theatre is family, whereas TV is like staying with friends.

TW: Have you performed at the Fringe before? How are you finding it this time?

PW: The last time I was on the Fringe was 1987! I came up to do a Joe Orton play. We lost all our money but had a great time. I'm loving being up here this time with my own play but it's hard work. There is such competition. I think I might be too old for all this!

'Shakespeare, His Wife and the Dog' is on at Summerhall until 24 Aug

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TW REVIEWS

Beans On Toast (Patch Of Blue)

Scott loves Jen, and Jen loves Scott, but Jen has gone. 'Beans On Toast' goes through all the significant moments of their relationship, out of sequence, with a song or two thrown in for good measure. These 'loveable' characters are sassy, fast-talking and so underdeveloped they remain practically stationary. Apart from when they have their sole argument, their relationship appears completely faultless, apparently formed with some kind of perfect couple cookie cutter. This lack of any real conflict makes for rather plodding viewing, with any meaning almost entirely lost in the action. The production is staged well by the cast, who all play Jen and Scott at various points, but this does nothing to stop it being a one dimensionally pretty, rather than meaningful, production.

Zoo Southside, until 25 Aug
tw rating 2/5 | [Charlotte Taylor]

**Guinea Pigs On Trial
(Sh!t Theatre / Escalator East
To Edinburgh)**

You can't accuse Sh!t Theatre of lacking ideas, although you could accuse them of lacking a decent idea filter. In fact, I got the sense that they just crammed every concept they ever had into this show, however appropriate these may be. The result is a piece that explores the murky world of drug trials in a half documentary expose, half absurdist comedy style. The amusingly zany routines work well to highlight the ridiculousness inherent in a system where people are paid to attend "Flucamp", but this wackiness obscures the core message about questionable pharmaceutical companies. As it stands, the show is fun and interesting enough, but it's no more effective than reading what might well be Sh!t Theatre's inspiration, Ben Goldacre's 'Bad Pharma'.

Summerhall, until 23 Aug.
tw rating 3/5 | [Andrew Bell]

**Ernest And The Pale Moon
(Les Enfants Terribles/Pins &
Needles)**

I would like to sincerely apologise to the nice lady in Pleasance One whose leg I grabbed during 'Ernest and the Pale Moon'. It was a scary bit. The story of disturbed Ernest's obsessive love for Gwendoline (and its tragic consequences) is a brutal gothic horror, with scenes that linger long in the mind. One in particular, featuring some hideous fingernails-on-wood sound effects, will truly haunt you. The music woven throughout is hugely effective, particularly Rachel Dawson's atmospheric cello. I do think the creepiness would have been better sustained if some performances had been dialled back a little, but overall this is something anyone who likes a good scare should see. Just don't sit next to me. I'll grab your leg.

Pleasance Courtyard, until 23 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Jon Stapley]



5/5 SHOW

**Dr Longitude's
Marvellous
Imaginary Menagerie
(Les Enfants Terribles)**

A magnificent musical of massive proportions, this show has everything - fantastic songs, fabulous costumes and above all, fun! We follow the tale of Dr Longitude and his esteemed colleague on their quest to find weird and wonderful animals for his Imaginary Menagerie. There's dancing, singing and even a bit of swimming as we encounter the fantastical beasts that he finds on his journey. Award-winning creators Les Enfants Terribles use expert puppetry and quirky costumes to bring the animals to life in front of your very eyes. There wasn't a child in the audience that wasn't squealing with delight. With just the right amount of audience participation, this big, bold, tongue-in-cheek comedy has got it all.

Pleasance Courtyard, until 25 Aug.
tw rating 5/5
[Bethan Highgate-Betts]

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TW REVIEWS

Kingmaker (The Spontaneity Shop)

"Why put up with cava, when we could have champagne?" asks London mayor and would-be Prime Minister Max Newman in this fast-paced political comedy. 'Kingmaker', a sparkling tale of Westminster intrigue and deception, certainly leans towards the latter. Clever observations combine with cutting one-liners to hugely entertaining effect as Max (Alan Cox) attempts to protect his leadership bid from a scheming whip and a young pretender. The mayor, a "teddy bear crossed with a serial killer", will seem familiar; but Cox's excellent depiction draws from rather than imitates real-life, and is stronger for it; laced with satire but not stifled by its source. At points 'Kingmaker' feels it needs more time - but that is minor piffle in an otherwise splendid performance.

Pleasance Courtyard, until 25 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Sarah Richardson]

Odd Shaped Balls (Chris Sheridan)

A rugby player is thrust unwillingly into the spotlight after being outed as gay in this stirring, thought-provoking piece of new writing. A one-man show, 'Odd Shaped Balls' is anchored by actor Chris Sheridan, who delivers a captivating performance as rugby player Jamie Hall. The story works so well because it's completely character driven - everything that unfolds is a direct result

of Jamie and who he is, his anger, his confusion and his frustration. If I have to nitpick (and I do), the ending is a little abrupt, leaving questions unanswered and sub-plots dangling, and one character's rather unconvincing Irish accent is a little distracting. Otherwise though, this is a heartfelt and moving play boasting an absolutely towering performance.

Gryphon@West End, until 23 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Jon Stapley]

Sochi 2014 (FULLfuse Theatre / The King's Head Theatre)

In the build up to the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, an international spotlight was briefly focused on the oppression of the LGBT community in Russia, only to fade as the Olympic torch moved away. This powerful piece of testimonial theatre, however, turns that light firmly back on. Simply staged but deeply researched, 'Sochi 2014' gives a chilling insight into the discrimination and shocking brutality suffered by Russia's homosexuals, as five actors give voice to victims denied the chance to speak themselves. Based on verbatim testimonies, the piece combines moments of gut-wrenching emotional power with challenging political commentary, and in showing the different attitudes LGBT Russians have towards their situation, has an unexpected and thought-provoking complexity. Compelling, intelligent theatre.

Pleasance Courtyard, until 21 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Sarah Richardson]



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5/5 SHOWS

< Spoiling (Traverse Theatre Company)

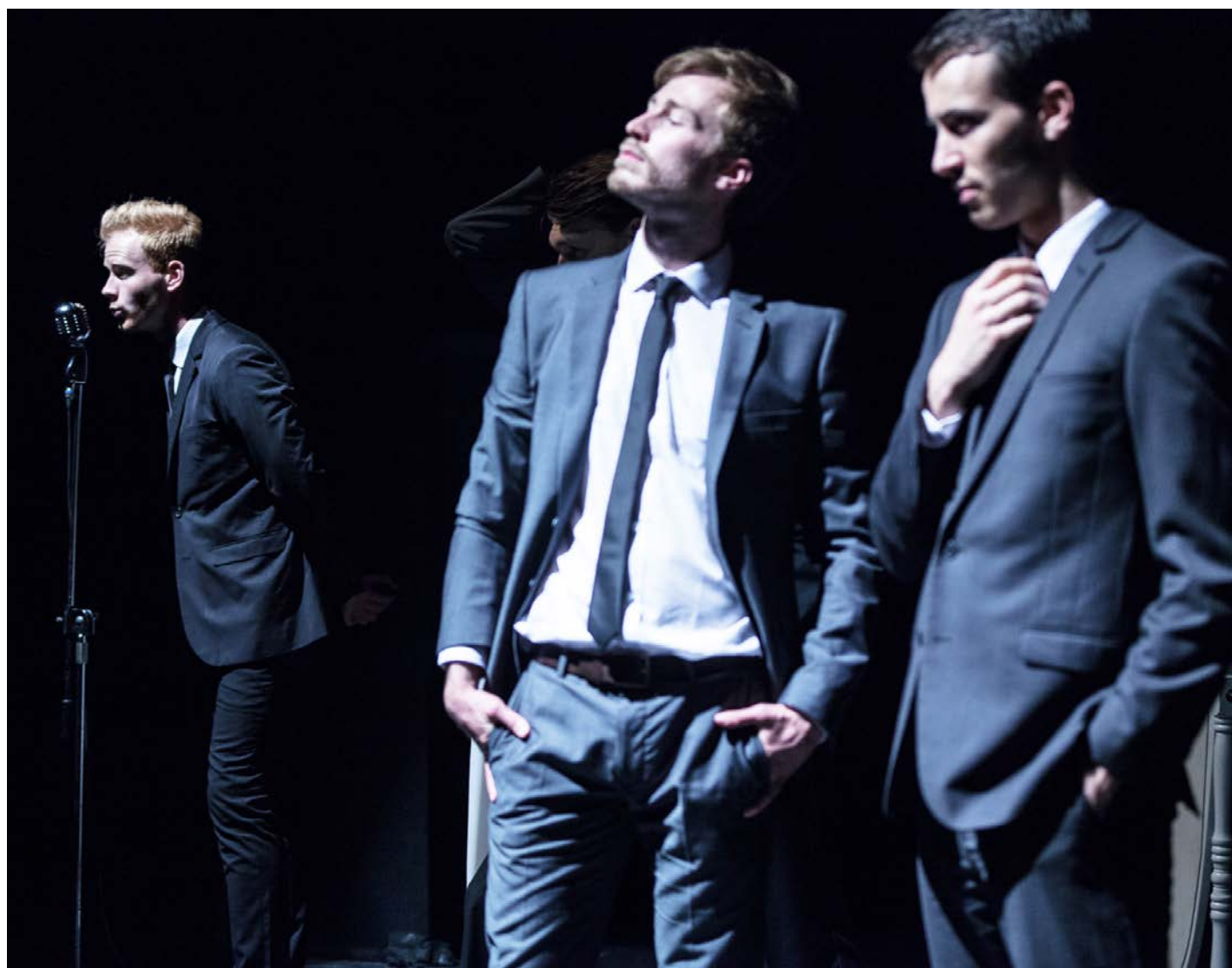
Set in a near future, where the Scottish people have decided to leave the UK, 'Spoiling' chronicles the morning of the Foreign Minister's first speech since gaining independence. By leaping forward in time, Traverse Theatre Company are able to bring some important and fresh ideas to the contemporary debate. These are made in an intelligent and informed manner, and are performed to perfection by the two actors, making it a timely piece of theatre that is sharp, funny and well executed. The show also looks back at the history of the UK and draws parallels with Northern Ireland. 'Spoiling' manages to balance the political and personal reasoning behind the 'yes' movement, and will leave you questioning your views on these complicated issues.

Traverse Theatre, until 25 Aug. tw rating 5/5 | [James McCall]

> Travesti (Unbound Productions)

There's something bizarrely compelling about watching a man, stripping and putting on make up, while speaking the words of a woman who's been the object of male intimidation. From sexualised pop routines performed with obvious and comical enjoyment, to the poignant realisations of a rape victim, 'Travesti' explores the varied experiences of being a woman. It's impossible to pick out an individual member of the young, all-male cast for praise. They all give nuanced, naturalistic performances, relating the stories from real-life interviews with great empathy. Rebecca Hill's direction juxtaposes different female perspectives, so that they create layers of new meaning, disagreement and unanimity. You know you've touched your audience when there are audible murmurs of agreement throughout. Flawless.

Pleasance Dome, until 25 Aug. tw rating 5/5 | [Laura Gavin]





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assembly George Square Studio 2
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Njo Kong Kie: A musical picnic with a twist



Photo: Rich Dyson

TW INTERVIEW

‘Picnic In The Cemetery’ is one of three shows brought to the Fringe by the Macao-based collective Point View Art Association. It’s a piece of work that almost seems to defy categorisation; the composer himself struggles to place his style within a conventional genre, and while this show has music at its heart, it’s only a part of what’s on display. Our reviewer was won over by this experimental and avant-garde acoustic performance, and her enthusiasm inspired us to find out more about the show from its creator, Njo Kong Kie.

TW: Where did the idea for the ‘Picnic In The Cemetery’ show come from?

NKK: The idea for the ‘Picnic In The Cemetery’ show came about after I joined the Macao-based artist collective Point View Art Association, which is bringing three shows to the Fringe, the dance theatre piece ‘Playing Landscape’, ‘Picnic In The Cemetery’ and an object theatre piece ‘Puzzle The Puzzle’, all under the banner Made in Macao. Our

collective is made up of artists from a cross section of disciplines, including visual artists, designers, composers, directors and producers, all behind the scene artists. Without their contributions, ‘Picnic In The Cemetery’ would only be a concert, not the multi-disciplinary experience that it is today.

TW: Some of the music in ‘Picnic In The Cemetery’ originates from an album of the same name - did you always intend for this music to become part of a performance, or did that idea come later?

NKK: I released the album in 2006, having composed the materials during a period of touring with musicians Simon Claude and Alexandre Castonguay, when we were working with the La La La Human Steps dance group. I called our trio Day Off, in reference to the fact that I wrote new music during the days off on tour in an attempt to amuse the other musicians. I’ve presented the repertoire at regular concerts, but always knew I would like to create a theatrical production. It only became reality, however, when I met the Point View Art artists in Macao.

TW: It’s an interesting title - where does that come from?

NKK: I love picnics, and I love cemeteries. For many years, I lived adjacent to a beautiful cemetery in Toronto, the Mount Pleasant Cemetery, and I found myself having

picnics there often. The scenery is beautiful, and the setting quiet; it offers a momentary relief from the hustle and bustle of the world. It also offers the chance to reflect on life and make peace with an inevitability that we are all scared of, one way or the other. It offers a connection to, or at least a meditation on, what may lie beyond our day-to-day.

TW: There are various elements to the show - props, physical theatre, film as well as the music - was it always the intention to include those, or did they emerge as you developed the piece?

NKK: As I said, it was always my intention to build this show to include elements outside of the musical realm. Collectively they give a much more lasting impression for the audience. But this is definitely a work in progress as far as the staging elements are concerned.

Because of the specifics of the venue here, the show is rather different from the version we did last year in Macao, and is different even from the version we did at the start of our run here. We changed the configuration of the room in a major way just this past week. Doing so many shows in a row, we do take the opportunity to hone our production as we go.

Many elements of the staging come about through improvisation during the show, others are added or

discarded from observation about how the show is working... I thank my team for being patient with me for changing cues every night prior to show. If you have seen the show, and if you come back again, you may have a different experience because something may have changed in the meantime.

TW: How would you describe your music? Does it fit into any specific genre category?

NKK: This is a hard question to answer. I’ve been trying to find an apt and simple description of my work so I can market it better - it’s also easier when it comes to grant applications - but I have not succeeded. When talking to audiences, however, the words they often use are minimalism, romanticism, rhythmical, visceral, melancholic, cinematic, dance-like, Philip Glass, Takemitsu, Umabayashi. Because of its roots in classical music, my work may be attractive to an audience who enjoys classical music, but I think that it is music for those who don’t even enjoy classical music, as it definitely has a more contemporary sensibility about it.

TW: Is there a specific story you are trying to tell, or message you are trying to communicate with this show?

NKK: ‘Picnic In The Cemetery’ juxtaposes the macabre with the

light hearted. One is the inevitable destination for all of us, the other is about choices we can make. It is a musing on dying, but more importantly a reflection on how we live. Everybody will take away from the show something different. There is a lot of abstract imagery, created with videos, installations, props and live action. They can seem specific but do offer room for interpretation.

TW: Tell us more about your fellow musicians - have you performed together much before?

NKK: I recorded the album with my Canadian colleagues, but when I work abroad, I often like to work with musicians from that region. Our violinist Hong Iat U performed this piece in Macao last year. He is from Macao and a graduate of the Central Conservatory Of Music in Beijing. He has an eclectic taste in music and is an aspiring jazz musician. I find that musicians who have experience and interest in a wide range of musical genres tend to get my work a lot quicker. David Wong, our cellist, hails from Hong Kong. David comes more from an orchestral background but is adapting to playing this kind of music very quickly.

Read more at ThreeWeeks.co.uk/njokongkie
‘Picnic In The Cemetery’ is on at C nova until 25 Aug

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MUSIC & MUSICALS

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TW MUSICALS

Circle Line (Red Brick Rent)

Circles are brilliant metaphors, and Ciaran Walshe uses them to great effect in this musical. Seven passengers, sitting in a straight line on a tube carriage, are forced to interact when their train breaks down. They could cut the chunks of dialogue that turn the characters into caricatures, and the credit crunch theme feels out of date, but the music is excellent. Most of the songs, aside from one or two jazzier numbers, have a melancholy, unresolved quality, lingering on suspended notes and weaving unusual melodies. There is a real sense of the crushing grind of a daily commute in a starved economy, and the wonderful music emulates that sensation of feeling alone even when surrounded by hundreds of people.

Greenside @ Royal Terrace, until 23 Aug.
tw rating 3/5 | [Tim Bano]

Dido And Aeneas (The About Turn Theatre Company)

Purcell's opera is given a WWII-era makeover in About Turn's surprisingly elaborate production. The talented young company tackles the score with gusto, though special credit should go to Victoria Pym's delightfully malevolent sorceress. I do have to question some of the more extravagant staging decisions though. For instance, a large suspended cloth obscures the stage when the audience enters, then spectacularly drops to reveal the cast. It's a nice moment, but thereafter the cloth serves no purpose except to give the actors something to trip over. Also, while I did like the WWII aesthetic, Aeneas walked into one scene looking quite a lot like Biggles, which undermined the drama a bit. Still, the singing is faultless and the story a classic.

theSpace @ Venue 45, until 23 Aug.
tw rating 3/5 | [Jon Stapley]



5/5 SHOW

The Addams Family (Royal Conservatoire Of Scotland)

Complete with a doom and gloom atmosphere, signature finger snaps, and even contemporary references, 'The Addams Family' is that classic family musical that never dies. With a fantastically spooky set and 'dead on' sound design and lighting, the show vastly resembles the television and cinematic representations. The only exceptions are a female Lurch and the presence of numerous ghostly relatives from a variety of decades past. The show is performed by students of the MA Musical Theatre Program at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, and was an exceptionally professional production overall. Stand-out performances came from Andrew Perry as Uncle Fester; Martin Murphy as Gomez Addams and Hannah Howie as Alice Beineke. This is one for the whole family, folks- even Thing.

The Assembly Hall, until 25 Aug. tw rating 5/5 | [Keara Barnes]

TW MUSIC

Concerto Without Orchestra (Worby And Farrell)

If Franz Liszt had met a daft friend to collaborate with, instead of bumping into Richard Wagner, these side-splitting, clever arrangements for many-handed pianos could have been the result. Those who remember Victor Borge and Gerard Hoffnung's musical humour will enjoy this; it's funny and intelligent - particularly the making of cocktails whilst playing Beethoven's 'Für Elise'. The inclusion of the performers' own serious composition interrupted the hilarious

mood, however, and the illusion that the orchestra was joining them remotely by live broadcast was not convincing. Their jokes and stage manner were wonderfully witty, with musical slapstick and exaggerated gestures; only the break in the fun stopped this from being a 5 star show.

The Assembly Rooms, until 24 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Louise Rodgers]

Elsa Jean McTaggart and Miss Irenie Rose

A sibling duo from the Isle of Lewis, Elsa Jean McTaggart and Miss Irenie Rose offer a session of melodic folk, lifted by ethereal harmonies, soulful songwriting and accomplished

musical skill. Though Irenie Rose looks less comfortable on stage than her older sister, the two are matched with equal talents on a collection of instruments including the melodian and fiddle. The frequent smiles and visible bond between the two adds a real dose of warmth to the performance. One tune on the tin whistle is wistful enough to leave me welling up a little, and songs of the Highland Clearances, departed relatives and journeys of all kinds are tinged with bittersweet nostalgia. A lovely respite from the milling festival crowds outside.

SpaceCabaret @ 54, until 22 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Laura Gavin]

Free Fringe Music (National Museum Of Scotland)

Spent all your ticket money? Well, there's still good music to enjoy for free, every day in the eclectic National Museum of Scotland in collaboration with Live Music Scotland. Today's performers were young Latin jazz guitar duo Knox and Ion. They wasted no time creating a relaxed, airy cafe atmosphere in these vibrant surroundings, not far from the legendary Millennium Clock; even toddlers found them irresistible and tried to storm the stage. Their music was a mixture of their own compositions (including the lively, quirky 'Mary', in memory of Tom Ion's granny) and standards such as 'Isn't She Lovely?' for Frazer Knox's new fiancée. Accomplished and likeable, with a talent for composition, this pair's offerings made for an enjoyable working lunch.

National Museum of Scotland, until 24 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Louise Rodgers]

Mosaico Flamenco (Alba Flamenca)

This exciting collaboration between jazz, folk and flamenco musicians was an intense labour of love. A recreation of the album 'Tierra' by Vicente Amigo, the album made a lasting impression on Spanish guitarist Andrew Robinson, so he called together some skilled musicians with diverse styles and personalities - this foot stomping night is the result. Fiddle player Heather Kennedy was a school friend and he met the others on his journey from classical to Spanish guitar. I was taken by the passion of singer and palmos artist Danielo Olivera and by the cheekiness of drummer David Montes. If I had been able to close my eyes I could have been in Spain! But close my eyes and miss this? No way, José!

Alba Flamenca, until 24 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Louise Rodgers]

TW

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Chap rhyming on the cabaret Fringe: Mr B

Chap-hop pioneer (or 'superstar', to cite the show name) Mr B is back at the Fringe. And this time he's promising "chap-hop, acid ragtime, drum and brass and naughty ballads". And what more could a Fringe audience desire? "Mr B will educate you in such matters as love, lust, how to be magnanimous after a breakup, and why hip hop is rather rubbish these days" says the blurb. Curious? We were. So we tracked down the chap himself to find out more.

TW: For those who have somehow never seen your shows, tell us all we need to know about chap-hop.

MB: Chap-hop is what you might get if Chuck D, Noel Coward and George Formby drunkenly decided to form a band.

TW: You're also promising some "acid ragtime, drum and brass and naughty ballads" this year. Do you have genre quotas in the show to ensure you deliver on the sales pitch?

MB: I have no idea what that last bit meant, but there will certainly be a bit of what was mentioned in the first sentence.

TW: Your show blurb also promises advice on "how to be magnanimous after a breakup". Any tips you can share with us now?

MB: Just assure your erstwhile sweetheart that the only thing you wish to keep will be the plastic surgery.

TW: How does a Gentleman Rhymer fill his days during the Fringe?

MB: Shopping for tweed, largely.

TW: Any recommendations for how other Fringe-going chaps can chill during the Festival frenzy?

MB: See above... and the occasional distillery tour usually does the job.

TW: You've played a number of festivals other than Edinburgh. How does the Fringe differ?

MB: The Fringe is different from all the other festivals. Most British summer festivals are simply jumped up village fêtes, enjoyable as they are, but Edinburgh is a city transformed into a sort of beautiful, colourful medieval version of Surrey.

TW: Can you reveal anything about the "exclusive new ditties" you're promising this year?

MB: I'd rather not reveal too much, suffice to say they are poorly rehearsed. That in itself should provide entertainment. Anything actually witty within them is just a bonus.

TW: And tell us why you're down on modern hip hop.

MB: I'm not down on all modern hip-hop. There is an awful lot of wonderful stuff out there. It just never gets heard on the radio or anything like that anymore. My chagrin is twofold though. On one hand, there's the over-hyped nonsense one does here on the radio, which I don't believe people actually like. They merely accept it as the norm if they are lazy enough. That and the snootiness of the 'keep-it-real backpack brigade' who have an equally narrow view of the genre. Apart from that it's all lovely.

TW: Favourite rhyme?

MB: Probably something by Kunt And The Gang.

TW: Favourite time (that's my favourite rhyme by the way)?

MB: Tea time.

TW: Favourite rhymer (other than yourself)?

MB: There are so many... Melle Mel, Ronald Frankau, Dame Edith Sitwell...

TW: And best tweed for the Fringe?

MB: I would head (as I generally do) straight for Walker Slater, if I were you.

'Chap-Hop Superstar' is on at the Voodoo Rooms until 24 Aug.



TW

5/5 SHOW

Divallusion (Christina Bianco and Ian Stroughair)

How good can an hour of diva impressions (with more costume changes than Beyoncé) actually be? The answer is: pretty darn good. Christina Bianco's vocal chords are more than versatile, they're like elastic, transforming her already formidable voice into the sounds of Barbara Streisand, Shakira and more. She even recites a William McGonagall poem in the Geordie twang of Cheryl Cole. In his flamboyant alter-ego Velma Celli, Ian Stroughair twirls and belts his way through pop and rock classics. A highlight was a memorable homage to Aussie star Sia's 'Chandelier' video (complete with glittering body stocking). The duo's onstage chemistry keeps the humour bouncing back and forth, and makes their obvious talent shine all the more brightly. Fabulous in every sense of the word.

Assembly Checkpoint, until 21 Aug. tw rating 5/5 | [Laura Gavin]



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5/5 SHOWS

The Sagas Of Noggin The Nog (Third Party Productions) >

Four of the least gruff Vikings you'll ever meet bring to life two gentle tales of Noggin The Nog in this delightful, funny hour of children's theatre. Combining live action, Python-esque animations and endearingly cute and surprisingly emotive puppets, this show walks the line between fun for kids and knowing jokes for adults without a single misstep. The cast effortlessly swap between a multitude of roles, with the wonderfully boo-able Nogbad The Bad really standing out. The script is sharp, mixing jokes, storytelling and song in equal measure, while the combination of puppetry and live action works remarkably well. 'The Sagas Of Noggin The Nog' is hilarious, sweet family fun that will entertain adults and children alike.

Assembly George Square Gardens, until 25 Aug. tw rating 5/5 | [Andrew Bell]

I Do, Do I (Greg Sinclair)

Music like you've never heard (or seen) it before! Greg Sinclair's show puts the kids firmly in charge as he becomes their musical puppet, flitting between instruments and everyday objects to make music. The children conduct him from pre-recorded audio, with the silent anticipation in between soon becoming as big a part of the show as any of the sounds. The show challenges the way we think about music, how we listen to it and how we make it. A beautiful, honest, endearing performance that leaves you with a smug smile on your face. This is one of the most original pieces, I've seen this year, a must see for kids and grown-ups alike.

Summerhall, until 24 Aug.
tw rating 5/5 | [Bethan Highgate-Betts]



TW REVIEWS

Big Red Bath (Full House Theatre with Half Moon / Escalator East To Edinburgh)

'Big Red Bath' has a very simple concept: two children are having a bath, and things - a dog-shaped slipper, a rubber duck- come to life around them. There's lots of singing and dancing and very little dialogue, making it perfectly suited to the festival's youngest audiences. The actors play the animals with joy and humour, giving a real sense of character to each, but it's the designer who really makes this show something special. Every detail is perfect, from the toilet seat turtle to

the lion's flannel mane, delighting the adults in the audience too. While maybe a little long for its target audience, this is a lovely introduction to the theatre, and to the magic that imagination can bring.

Pleasance Courtyard, until 24 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Gemma Scott]

Land Of The Dragon - Gwlad y Ddraig (PuppetSoup)

PuppetSoup, a Welsh group that create spectacular and completely immersive storytelling experiences, have done it again with 'Land Of The Dragon'. Mesmerising puppetry brings to life the tale of the Welsh Dragon in this fantastically entertaining children's show. Swapping between Welsh and English narration, the

beautifully choreographed movement of each puppeteer is delight to behold. Although billed as a piece for 5-105 year olds, it's not for the faint-hearted: there wasn't a child in the audience that didn't cry. This is a beautifully put together production, the narrative challenging only because of how emotionally evocative it is. If you've ever fancied losing yourself in Welsh folklore for 45 minutes, this is the show for you!

ZOO, until 25 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Bethan Highgate-Betts]

Flamenco For Kids (Ricardo Garcia's Flamenco Flow - Spain)

If you've got a child who is interested in music, colour and movement, then you can't go wrong with a trip to

Ricardo Garcia's 'Flamenco For Kids', a short workshop aimed at younger children. It begins with a discussion of what to expect from the coming hour, then Garcia himself emerges, guitar in hand, to introduce the children to the music of flamenco. Before long, he is joined by a brightly clad dancer, and the pair take the children through a number of different moves, which are joined together for a final 'performance'. The children concentrate very hard, enjoy dressing up in Spanish attire, and are proud to receive their carers' applause at the end. A lively experience, that had me looking up flamenco classes in my area shortly afterwards!

C, until 25 Aug
tw rating 4/5 | [Caro Moses]



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Festival People

Showcasing at the Fringe:
Welsh Dance Strand

There are many reasons performers come to the Edinburgh Fringe, but an important one is the opportunity to showcase work in front of both audiences and cultural decision makers from across the globe. And so good is the Festival for such showcasing, cultural bodies in numerous countries and regions now assist performers and companies to help them get the most out of their Edinburgh experience. One new initiate in this domain is the Welsh Dance Strand taking place at Zoo this week, featuring four dance theatre companies from Wales. It's organised by Coreo Cymru, an organisation set up in 2012 to promote "dance talents and dance products" in Wales.

"Last year we presented the Dance Dome at the Fringe" says Coreo Cymru's Carole Blade, "and the Arts Council Of Wales developed the Wales In Edinburgh Fund, which helped support Welsh companies being presented at the Festival. The Welsh Dance Strand is an extension of that idea to have a stronger presence at an international festival for Wales. This international exposure is a key part in developing the touring opportunities and professional practice for our artists".

"We have an electric mix of dance makers and styles in the Strand", Blade says, outlining the four productions being presented under the umbrella this week. "Renowned dance artist Jo Fong brings 'An Invitation...' a unique piece developed through extensive

research, investigating the relationship between the audience and performer and how those boundaries can be dissolved".
She continues: "TaikaBox presents 'Beyond The Body', a multi sensory mix of beautifully crafted choreography with stunning visuals and soundscape. Harnisch Lacey Dance brings 'SPIN', an action packed mix of contemporary, parkour and break dancing. And Kitsch And Sync will bring their unique cabaret style of comedic dance theatre, featuring electro swing hop movement styles, audience participation, and toe tapping music all tied together with a loving bow".

Coreo Cymru is supporting the featured companies in a number of ways, including on marketing, PR and promoter engagement, "allowing artists to develop their practice while minimising the risk involved" Blade adds. "It's important that Welsh work is seen outside Wales", she concludes, further explaining the rationale for the Welsh Dance Strand project, "giving artists the opportunity to develop their practice, build international relationships and acknowledge the quality of their own work in a wider context".

All four productions are playing at Zoo until 25 Aug.



All about ThreeWeeks

LONGEST ESTABLISHED: ThreeWeeks is the longest established magazine at the Edinburgh Festival, the world's biggest cultural event, and has been discovering and championing new and exciting comedy, cabaret, dance, musical, theatre and spoken word talent every summer since 1996.

HALF A MILLION READERS: Each August half a million festival-goers rely on the ThreeWeeks free weekly magazine, daily email, website and podcast for a comprehensive guide to all of the festivals that take place in Edinburgh during August, including the International, Book, Art and Politics festivals and the awe inspiring Edinburgh Fringe.

ALL OVER EDINBURGH: The ThreeWeeks weekly magazine is available to pick up for free at sites all over Edinburgh during August, with pick-up points in bars, cafes and box offices at all the key festival venues. This preview edition is also delivered direct to homes all over central Edinburgh.

EIGHTEEN YEARS EXPERIENCE: The ThreeWeeks editors have been covering the Edinburgh Festival for over eighteen years, and provide their expertise and continued passion for the world's greatest cultural extravaganza each August, interviewing performers, directors and producers, commissioning guest

columns, and reporting on key events in the Festival City.

VIBRANT REVIEW TEAM: This experience is complemented each year by a vibrant young review team who take in hundreds of shows first hand, sharing their opinions in ThreeWeeks, and helping us spot and champion the best new talent.

MEDIA-SKILLS PROGRAMME: Since 1996 ThreeWeeks has also run an acclaimed media-skills training programme each summer, providing formal and on-the-ground arts journalism training to hundreds of talented young writers, giving future arts and media talent guidance, feedback and unique access to the world's most exciting festival. An all-new ThreeWeeks media-skills programme will launch in Spring 2015. This year we welcome back a number of alumni from media-skills programmes past to review the Festival.

THREEWEEKS WEEKLY EDITION: The ThreeWeeks Weekly Edition is our flagship publication, published weekly during August and packed with reviews, interviews and exclusive columns. You can pick up your free copy of ThreeWeeks from all the key venues at the Edinburgh Festival and numerous other places across the city as well.

THREEWEEKS DAILY EDITION: The ThreeWeeks Daily Edition lands in the inbox of thousands and thousands of Fringe fans every day, in the run up to and during the Festival. It provides all the latest news, interviews, columns and reviews in one place. To sign up for free go to ThreeWeeks.co.uk/signup

THREEWEEKS ONLINE: In addition to the weekly magazine and daily email, there is ThreeWeeks Online. All our features and reviews appear here, plus you can search content by genre and venue. And it's here you will find the ever popular ThreeWeeks Podcast for audio coverage of the Festival. Get online at ThreeWeeks.co.uk

THISWEEK LONDON: ThisWeek London is a new sister media to ThreeWeeks, providing year round coverage of cultural events in London, including daily recommendations from the ThisWeek team, and the Caro Meets interviews with some of our favourite performers, producers and directors. ThisWeek London also benefits from ThreeWeeks' eighteen years covering the Edinburgh Festival, tipping Fringe favourites old and new (and brand new) as they appear in London. Check us out at ThisWeekLondon.com, or sign up for the weekly bulletin at ThisWeekLondon.com/signup.

CREDITS & INFO>

Editors & Publishers: Chris Cooke and Caro Moses
Commissioning Editor: Caro Moses
Production & News Editor: Chris Cooke
Picture Editor: Kat Gollock
Podcast Editor: Tom Bragg
Sub Editor: Gemma Scott
Review Team: Andrew Leask, Andrew Bell, Bethan Highgate-Betts, Bruce Blacklaw, Charlotte Taylor, Dave Fagnoli, David O'Connor, George Robb, Hannah Cutting, James McColl, Jon Stapley, Keara Barnes, Laura Gavin, Laura Kidd,

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Accounts & Admin Manager: Jason Rust
Design Support: Edward Stone
Founders: Chris Cooke, Geraint Preston, Alex Thomson

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GET IN TOUCH!
Editorial contact: TWedinburgh@unlimitedmedia.co.uk
Advertising contact: TWadvertising@unlimitedmedia.co.uk
News desk: TWnews@unlimitedmedia.co.uk
Complaints: complaints@unlimitedmedia.co.uk
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"HILARIOUS, LONG LIVE MACMAXWELL"
"THIS IS ANOTHER COMEDIC, HEAVYWEIGHT HOUR OF STAND-UP FROM MAXWELL"
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TOM RHODES

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Tom Rhodes"
- Doug Stanhope

9.15PM GILDED BALLOON

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"RHODES BOLDLY, BRASHLY AND BOLSHLY BOMBARDS US DURING HIS HOTLY ANTICIPATED DEBUT"

GLENN WOOL

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EXTRA SHOW TBA

9.30PM UNDERBELLY, BRISTO

"THE SCOTSMAN
"BRILLIANT... WOOL REFRESHES THE PARTS MANY STAND-UPS CANNOT REACH"
"COMEDY GOLD CLEANED FROM AMONGST THE GREYNESS OF EVERYDAY LIFE"
"THE POINT IS VERY WELL STRUCTURED. HE CHALLENGES THE AUDIENCE FROM THE GET GO"
"THIS IS PURE WOOL'S GOLD!"
"HE KEEPS JUST THE RIGHT SIDE OF OFFENSIVE"
"FEW COMEDICANS DO THAT. TIGHT BUT LOOSE. TIGHT BUT NOT TOO TIGHT."
"HIS BEST GAGS... A PRETTY SOLID HIT RATE"
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THE SCOTSMAN

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FELICITY WARD THE ICEBERG

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"BRILLIANT, THE ICEBERG IS A SOLID AND CLEVERLY CRAFTED HOUR"
"HILARIOUS"

TIM FITZHUGH HELL FIRE

6.40PM PLEASANCE DOME

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"EXCEPTIONAL COMIC TIMING" (ON THE CIRCUS)
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GLENN COSBY

4.00PM ASSEMBLY, ROXY



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