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EDINBURGH

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Speedy updates from the Edinburgh Festival

Want to stay up to speed with all the goings on across the Edinburgh Festival? Look out for regular speedy updates from the ThreeWeeks news team in the TW Daily email. Sign up for free at threeweeksedinburgh.com/signup. Meanwhile, here's a batch to get you going...

EDINBURGH COMEDY AWARDS
A chunk of the comedy fraternity amassed for Sunday lunch last weekend with the traditional Fringe kick-off gathering organised by the Edinburgh Comedy Awards and paid for, presumably, by its nice new sponsor Lastminute.com. And if you are wondering who, exactly, is judging

all that this year, well, it's the BBC's Sam Michell, Channel 4's Laura Riseam, ITV's Saskia Schuster, The Scotsman's Claire Smith, The Times's Dominic Maxwell, it's Alice Jones, the Melbourne International Comedy Festival's Susan Provan and comedy fans Niki Di Palma, Jim Johnson and Sam Haslam.

WILL FRANKEN'S ALTERNATIVE COMEDY AWARD
Talking of awards, character comedian Will Franken has announced his intention to launch his own award this year, the Defining The Norm Awards. In a nod to the Fringe's 'defying the norm' slogan this year, as well as contributing to the customary debate about the over commercialisation of the comedy Fringe - and the role the big awards have in that process - Franken says his will be the one truly honest awards programme, "celebrating the safety, sameness and sycophancy so integral to the world's largest and most expensive comedy festival". Hmm, I wonder who he'll pick to win.

THE THREEWEEKS EDITORS' AWARDS
Talking of Will Franken and awards, we gave him one of our ThreeWeeks

Editors' Awards a couple of years back, which are very much anti-bland we reckon. And they, by the way, will return at the end of this year's Festival once again. We have no categories, no precise remits, no particular agenda, other than celebrating shows and performers who we think are bloody brilliant. Watch this space for more info.

TW:TALKS LIVE
Did we mention that this is our 21st year covering the Edinburgh Festival? To celebrate we are staging five live podcast recordings at theSpace @ Symposium Hall next week, in which we will interview five former ThreeWeeks cover stars: Mark Thomas, Susan Calman, Brendon Burns, Lucy Porter and (current cover star) Mark Watson. You can come along, listen in and ask your own questions. Book yourself some free tickets at thisweektalks.com

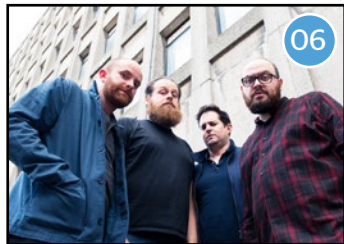
BOOK FESTIVAL INCOMING
Don't forget that alongside all the madness of the Fringe and the International Festival that is already occurring in this here festival city (and let's not forget the Tattoo and Art Festival), the Edinburgh International Book Festival kicks off next weekend. Says director Nick Barley of his programme this year: "You could say that the theme of this year's festival is 'Project No Fear'. It's about encouraging and celebrating the sort of courageous, positive, creative thinking that we desperately need in order to make the world a better place for everyone, rather than just for a privileged few".

BOOK FESTIVAL TIPS
Don't forget Caro's Three To See tips for the Book Festival: Leila Al-Shami and Robin Yassin-Kassab, Aarathi Prasad and the 'The Write To Read - Discussing Dyslexia' event. Oh, and Malcolm Harvey (pictured) and Michael Keating discussing the renewed debate over the possibility of Scottish Independence. Even though that's four tipped events.

THREES TO SEE
Talking of Will Franken and awards, we gave him one of our ThreeWeeks

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Jonny & The Baptists: A bit of politics and ping pong

Rock solid
ThreeWeeks
favourites Jonny & The Baptists return to the Fringe once again with a brand new show about inequality and the wealth gap. Which might sound a little serious, though this musical comedy duo have demonstrated before that they can take on political issues while keeping us well and truly entertained. Which is to say, there'll be plenty of funny songs while they subtly feed your brain with facts and arguments. We caught up with both Jonny Donahoe and Paddy Gervers to get the lowdown.

CC: Can we call you 'Fringe veterans' yet? You've done a lot of shows here - what's draws you back each time?

Jonny: 'Veteran' sounds like too serious a word for a couple of guitarists from Reading spending their summer doing funny songs. This is our fifth Edinburgh show together, but you still feel nervous every time, especially as it's where we premiere new material. As long as people enjoy it we'll keep coming back and hoping we're still allowed a career.
Paddy: It's hard to imagine doing anything else. Edinburgh is the best place in the world in August. Though I wouldn't call us 'veterans' so much, more like the problem locals at a very, very large pop-up bar.

CC: Tell us about 'Eat The Poor' - what's the theme and storyline?

Paddy: The show's about inequality



Photo by
Kat Gollock

and the wealth gap, how we got here and where it's taking our society.
Jonny: Alongside presenting a load of research there's a full, epic storyline this year. It's mostly set in the future, but it's a true story. I betray Paddy; betray him for money, fame and more money. I even end up married to Jerry Hall. Paddy has a terrible time, ends up homeless.
Paddy: I hate the future. The future's awful.

CC: What motivated the show?

Jonny: Inequality is like Everest for us. It's there and it's massive, so we thought we should explore it. We've spent six months researching it. We've spent a lot of time with the homelessness charity Crisis, we've tried to learn a small amount of economics, and we've played a huge amount of table tennis. Too much table tennis. To be honest, it would be a better show if there had been less table tennis, but what can you do?

CC: You've played with political themes a lot in recent shows. Was that always an ambition, or did it kind of evolve that way in response to world events?

Paddy: We got together not long after the first Conservative-led government of 2010. Whenever a new Tory government gets in there's a sort of Bat-Signal that goes out and all the lefty comedians, musicians and artists

get paired up together via a ballot to fight injustice. Like in the 1980s, with people like Alexei Sayle and the alternative comedy movement. And if it weren't for their tireless work, we'd never have got rid of Thatcher after several terms and a coup by her own party. We feel we've achieved the same strategy with David Cameron.

CC: How do shows with a narrative compare to more conventional gigs?

Jonny: They're really hard to promote. The shows now are part-theatre, part-comedy and part-music. So every journalist believes that we aren't technically within their editorial remit.

CC: Do you come up with the narrative and then write songs to fit, or do you have some songs already done that you squeeze in?

Paddy: It's a bit of both really. This story is one that we've wanted to write for a long time so we've had lots of ideas for songs and drafts of bits of material that we knew we could work with. Then you hope it all comes together just in time. And if not, the train from London to Edinburgh is almost five hours, so you can get a lot of panicked rewriting done then.

CC: It's been a busy few months in the world of politics. Is there, like material for about twenty

new shows in that lot?

Jonny: People always say to us, when awful things happen in the world, 'Oh that must be great for you, you don't even need to think of any new material'. The truth is, we'd much rather have no career and just be playing table tennis, if we could swap that for a fairer society.

CC: Do you think comedy can change the minds of an audience - or at least make an audience aware of certain issues?

Paddy: Definitely. It's not like one show is going to suddenly turn someone's views on their heads, but it's important to keep talking about these things and hope you're part of a wider eco-system that encourages debate. And we definitely think that laughter makes people more receptive to engaging with different opinions. We tour the shows across the UK and play to a lot of people who maybe don't agree with us, but are willing to listen so long as there are fun songs about swans.

CC: You've toured with Mark Thomas, another comedy performer who has found interesting ways to bring politics into his work. Although you are doing something quite different, are you inspired by his output? And any other comedians with a political agenda?

Jonny: Mark is absolutely brilliant. He's a huge inspiration and such a warm, kind, generous person. If we could be anything like him when we're a bit further along our careers, that would be amazing. There's also a wealth of intelligent political comics from our generation - Nish Kumar, Tiernan Douieb, Josie Long, Ria Lina - who are doing great things, and hopefully we can also inspire each other a bit.

CC: You are back at Summerhall again this year. It has an eclectic programme, but isn't so known for its comedy. What attracts you to the venue?

Jonny: We love Summerhall. The people, the staff, the audiences are brilliant. We play at Paines Plough's Roundabout venue - it's a pop-up 160-seat theatre in the round which is the most beautiful, intimate space. Plus Summerhall has its own gin distillery and there's a pub round the corner with a table tennis table.
Paddy: We won't say which pub, don't ruin it for us.

Jonny And The Baptists perform 'Eat The Poor' at Roundabout @ Summerhall until 28 Aug.

Robert Shaw: Inside intelligence on the Fringe's new play thriller

Inside Intelligence
is a company that has been pushing boundaries with new theatre for over two decades. This Fringe it presents 'Poena 5X1', a new political thriller from playwright Abbie Spallen exploring "sex, politics and the power of love". The play was commissioned by Inside Intelligence's Robert Shaw, who also directs the show. We caught up with him to find out more.

CC: Tell us about the premise of 'Poena 5X1'.

RS: It's a dystopian, Scandi noir thriller about sex, politics and the power of love. An idealistic government scientist has developed a new drug - a 'humane form of chemical punishment' - as a solution to the global problem of prison over-crowding. But what happens when the decision is taken to exploit the new drug for profit?

CC: What themes are being explored?

RS: I guess the main themes are love, sex, politics, justice and retribution vs rehabilitation. At its heart, it's about the tension between love and justice and what happens when the process of exacting justice is subjected to free market forces.

CC: You commissioned Abbie Spallen to write the piece. How



did come to work with her?

RS: I've known her for a number of years and liked her work, especially her plays 'Pumpgirl', which was a hit at the Traverse in 2006, and 'Lally The Scut', which is a scabrous, satirical play about Northern Irish politics that was a hit in Belfast in 2015. It was a natural step for me to ask to her write a play for us and I'm delighted she agreed to my commission.

CC: Did you commission something very specific, or

simply a new play? How does the commission process work, both at the outset, and as the play is being written?

RS: It depends. Sometimes you have a very specific idea and then look for a writer to develop it with. But in this case, I asked Abbie what she was interested in writing about and she came up with this story, which grabbed me straightaway. She delivered a first draft, which we talked about and I had some notes for her. I also found the

subtitle - 'Or How I Came To Agree With Right Wing Thinking' - very interesting and provocative and it gave me some thoughts for how the plot might develop, which we talked about and she incorporated them into the final draft.

CC: Has the script evolved further as the show went into production?

RS: There's an inevitable process of refining the text for performance which takes place at the start of

rehearsals. Edinburgh also presents its own challenges, with the slot being a very defined length. That helps to concentrate the mind - "have we said this already?", "could we say this better or more concisely?" - that sort of thing. We're intent always on respecting and honouring the play and at least we can feel happy that this is what we've done.

CC: Tarik O'Regan has provided an original score for the piece. How did that tie-up come about?

RS: I was lucky enough to direct the European premiere of Tarik's opera 'The Wanton Sublime' last year. Tarik is very open to new ways of working. He mentioned that he was interested in getting involved with writing music for theatre. He's also getting into electro-acoustic music and this fitted really well with the kind of soundscapes I was looking for to accompany the Scandi noir feel of this production. All in all, this seemed like the perfect opportunity to ask him to get involved. And he said yes!

CC: Tell us more about Inside Intelligence.

RS: I founded Inside Intelligence 21 years ago. We started life as a confused child and then became an unruly teenager. It's bit worrying to think we're starting to grow up! I may have to do something about that. I've always been interested in the connection between theatre and music. This production felt like the perfect way

to explore that interaction. Of all the things we've done since 1995, 'Poena 5X1' is in many ways the show I'm most proud of. How lucky am I to be able to say that after 21 years! I guess the objective is to continue being excited by the work and the process of developing it and presenting it, however hesitantly, to audiences.

CC: The Edinburgh Fringe has a solid reputation as a place to premiere new theatre. Is it still a good place to present new plays?

RS: Yes, it is. It's really scary. But that's good. It means you've fully invested in the work; that you're putting yourself out there for everyone to see. It's the risk that makes it worthwhile. Edinburgh is still, I think, one of the best places in the world to take those risks. The possibilities in Edinburgh always seems so much greater than elsewhere.

CC: What are the future plans for 'Poena 5X1'?

RS: Right now, getting to the end of the Fringe intact is all I can think about. Making plans can be dangerous. Hopes are always present. London would be nice. We're interested in touring. The show's future hangs in the balance - how will Edinburgh respond to what we've done?

'Poena 5X1' is on at the Underbelly Med Quad until 29 Aug.

/theatre



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The Glorious Monster: Glorious wrong uns

There's a very high chance you've seen sketches from The Glorious Monster on YouTube, where their great comedy creations and high production values grabbed plenty of attention, not least from production company Hat Trick whose chief has dubbed the group "the next League Of Gentlemen". As they perform their debut Edinburgh show 'Wrong Uns', we spoke to the group's Martin Collins about the characters, the show, the telly projects and making it on YouTube.



Photo by David P Scott

CC: Let's start at the start, how did you guys come together to perform sketch comedy goodness?

MC: Alex Finch and I met through a sketch group called Broken Biscuits. We wanted to start writing ourselves, to see the way we viewed the world really come to life. Daniel Hoffmann-Gill and Adam Loxley were two brilliant actors we really admired and we were chuffed when they liked the writing and came on board to form the troupe. So often sketch comedy can be about the 'live show' - sketches that are observational or based around 'wouldn't it be funny if...' - which, of course, is great. But we want to present a world of three dimensional characters that are alive, relatable and sometimes even weirdly loveable.

CC: What can we expect from 'Wrong Uns'?

MC: We're a sketch show that delves in to the dark side of humanity. We want to explore the nooks and the crannies of every day life. The Wrong Uns are the people you come across that give us the stories that start with "you'll never guess who I met..." From a driving instructor who wants a go on your 'gear stick' to the world's most sadistic HR ladies - from a coma nurse who uses her patients as a stand for her iPad to the dysfunctional family life of a 'closet' clown - it's a deliciously twisted world.

CC: Many people may have previously seen your sketches on YouTube. How does the live show compare? Do the characters seen online appear?

MC: Lots of those characters come up in the show, alongside a load of new ones. With 'Wrong Uns' we've tried to add to this by giving some of our favourites a narrative arc. We love the idea of a story slowly building, adding meat to the characters and jokes over time - which people seem to love.

CC: Things seem to be moving very fast for you guys. And it all seemed to begin with the YouTube channel?

MC: Yes, we started with the idea of 'let's just make it' and make it to the

best of our ability. The production values of the sketches - along with what we hope is strong writing and performance - has been the thing that gained us attention. After the first ones went live, a producer at Hat Trick messaged us on Facebook asking to meet up and things moved on quickly from there. We made a taster for the BBC and now we're here, doing our Edinburgh debut!

CC: Ah yes, I heard about the Hat Trick tie up. The boss there, Jimmy Mulville, has called you "the next League Of Gentlemen". That's probably a lot to live up to! How do you think your work compares to theirs? Do they inspire your comedy?

MC: We love The League of Gentlemen - as so many do - and of course they're an influence. We love character and the idea of creating a real world for people to invest in. But we're also careful to add a great deal of our own voice to our characters. We hope there's a sweetness and vulnerability to many of them, beneath all the various layers of wrong.

CC: An increasing number of performers are launching their careers with a YouTube channel. Any tips for aspiring comedy types hoping to make content for and build an audience on YouTube?

MC: For us, it was and is always about making it as beautiful as possible. We spend a great deal of time on planning the detail and how we might shoot things - sets, costumes, characters etc. We worked with a great director in Stephen Pipe, who helped us get the best out of our limited resources. That said, the most important thing is to just keep making stuff! Never wait for 'THE' idea. Make something, learn, then make something else. It's all about getting better, taking notes from people you trust, and keeping the fun alive. Saying that, try not to make your YouTube videos too long - three minutes is a good target!

This Glorious Monster are on at Pleasance Courtyard until 29 Aug.

/comedy

Mark Watson: Who is, in fact, here

Despite giving Mark Watson one of our Editors' Awards in 2005, we somehow forgot to ever put him on the cover. This despite our love for his numerous Edinburgh shows, those 24 hour plus marathon Fringe performances, 'Mark Watson Makes The World Substantially Better' and all his other Radio 4 outings, the telly projects, the many collaborations with the equally marvellous Tim Key and Alex Horne, and whatever bit of his biog we just missed out. With Mark somehow managing to fit an entire Fringe run into the 84 date tour of his current show 'I'm Not Here' - while also staging another stint of his Olympics-themed 'Edinborolympics' - this seemed like the year to address the never-had-Mark-Watson-on-the-cover oversight. So we had a chat with the man himself.

CC: So, while you ARE here, tell us about 'I'm Not Here'. What's the premise for the show?

MW: It begins with an incident that happened to me at an airport, to do with my passport being deemed invalid. Well, actually, it normally begins with some characteristic messing about, but eventually we get to the airport. From there I try to talk about the idea of identity in a digital age. But with jokes; lots of jokes.

CC: Once you've picked a premise, how strict are you on making sure the subsequent material sticks to it?

MW: I suppose I'm strict about making it SEEM like the material sticks to it. I try to make sure that everything is woven together, at least loosely, because I think it's important to feel you've seen an actual show, rather than an extended set. I've seen an awful lot of Edinburgh shows in my time and the best ones were usually - not always, but usually - those which were cunningly structured as well as just funny. So there are a few jokes I'm really fond of which just wouldn't fit into this show and were dropped. It's like picking a football team. You can have maverick players but everyone must fit the system.

CC: Were you tempted to sell tickets, not show up, and then just point out you've fulfilled the remit of the show's title?

MW: We talked about it, yes. It would have been the greatest stunt since that year Tim Vine got a massive billboard that said 'TIM VINE IS NOT APPEARING AT THIS YEAR'S FESTIVAL'. In the end there was a group decision that, just possibly, some audience members would feel disappointed, despite the literal accuracy. Also, I'd be a bit annoyed not to be performing the show after all this work!

CC: You are doing a massive tour of this show. What made you want to include a full Edinburgh run in the middle of that tour?

MW: Partly masochism. I'm never happier than when I'm putting myself through some sort of endurance effort. And partly, Edinburgh will always be my home as a comedian. There have been years where I just did part of the Festival, but it always feels like arriving at a party when most of the wine's already gone and people are asleep in the bath.

CC: Let's talk about the other show. For the uninitiated, what's the Edinborolympics?

MW: It's a - very inaccurate and unwanted - homage to the real Olympics, which began four years ago because the Fringe overlapped with the London Games. We've since done one for the Commonwealth Games, so this is the third. Essentially it's a cross between 'It's A Knockout' and a school sports day, but if everyone at a school



Photo by David P Scott

sports day was drunk - as indeed, looking back, some of them may have been.

CC: Who are you planning/hoping/intending to involve this year?

MW: Among our combatants are James Acaster, Sam Simmons, Josie Long, Sofie Hagen, Nish Kumar and Luisa Omelan. But loads more too; we've got some of our best ever line-ups.

CC: Will you be doing anything to give the whole thing a bit of a Rio feel to it?

MW: Nothing too spectacular, except we're trucking in nine hundred thousand tonnes of sand to recreate Copacabana, and stationing dozens of armed police outside the Pleasance Beyond to put down any protestors.

CC: I've always been a big fan of your Radio 4 shows. Though did you actually make the world substantially better?

MW: If you look at a general review of 2016, I think you'll have to accept that absolutely nothing has gone wrong in the world. Hang on. WHAT? JESUS CHRIST. This is why these days the series is just called 'Mark Watson Talks A Bit About Life'. It's a less daunting target.

Mark Watson's 'Edinborolympics' is on at Pleasance Courtyard from 18-22 Aug. His solo show, 'I'm Not Here', is on at Pleasance Courtyard until 28 Aug.

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/comedy

Njambi McGrath: One-liners, big issues

Born and educated in Kenya, before attending university in both the US and UK, and now London-based, Njambi McGrath has been garnering lots of attention in recent years as she's worked the comedy circuit and new talent competitions. Adept at writing very fine one-liners, while also delving into some serious topics in her shows, Njambi brings '1 Last Dance With My Father' to this year's Festival. We had a quick chat to find out more.



Photo by Kat Gollock

CC: For those who have not been paying any attention whatsoever, let's start at the start. How did you first get into comedy?
NM: I never considered myself a comedian. I work as a childbirth teacher and wanted to make my classes more exciting, especially for new fathers-to-be, since the mothers are usually already on board. So I wrote some jokes. And they laughed a lot and paid so much more attention on how to help their wives or girlfriends during birth. Basically I hoped to make a scary thing less frightening. After one session, a man - who was a film script writer - came to

me and asked if I had ever considered stand-up, which took me completely by surprise. When I told my husband about it he encouraged me to try, so I went along to the Comedy Café in Shoreditch. I spoke to the owner who gave me a slot two weeks later, and then I was bitten by the comedy bug.

CC: You seem to have been in the finals of pretty much every new comedian competition in the last couple of years, what's that been like?
NM: Getting to the finals is exiting, to know that I have been selected purely on merit and the quality of my writing, so it's a very nice feeling of achievement. It's also frustrating because it feels like you're so close but yet so far! It feels like being at school again and you are one mark off an A, but you can't keep telling people how close you were to the prize without sounding weird.

CC: Tell us about '1 Last Dance With My Father'.
NM: It's a poignant comedy about my journey to discover who my father was. He was a violent tee-totaller who I hated but, having done lots of research about his life, I went from being angry to being desperately sad for my father, to having sheer respect and appreciation of how awesome he was. People go through their whole lives without asking their parents about their childhood. You don't know what you will unearth. It's ironic that I did so much study about his life, because he was a great believer in education.

CC: It covers some pretty serious events. Was it easy to find the comedy in the themes?
NM: It's always tricky making jokes about something that upset you for most of your life, but it's also quite therapeutic. At first talking about it was painful, but I like taking the audience through the journey because, even with the darkest material, one can find little gems to make fun of. It's also a thin line between tasteless jokes and dark humour. It is the bleakness of life

that can have the funniest moments. When I started my research I spent the first six months crying and once that was out of the way I could then begin to laugh.
CC: People have noted that you combine one-liner comedy with some pretty serious topics, which is unusual. Was that deliberate, or did that just come naturally to you?
NM: That was purely accidental. I worry if people don't laugh for a while, and I like the instant gratification of laughter. One-liners weren't what I aspired to do, rather, it was the doing of my ego. It's important for me to be the voice of so much unspoken horror but, at the same time, I want the audience to remain on my side. Nevertheless, I think my shows are thought provoking, and it is always pleasant to receive a tweet or email from people who read further on the topics I raised, be it the massacre of half of the population in Congo by King Leopold II of Belgium or domestic abuse.

CC: Tell us about the comedy nights you organise in London.
NM: I run a comedy club called Heavenly Comedy in Shepherd's Bush. It's a new material night which allows me to experiment with ideas and, when I'm sure they work, I can then take them to other new material nights before the new jokes finally become part of my set. It's also great for previewing Edinburgh shows and I get a chance to know a lot of awesome comics.

CC: Does promoting comedy nights help you develop your own comedy career?
NM: Yes and no. It's a good experimental space, and I do have fun trying different things out. But promoting is also very time consuming. It helps that the night has a new material focus and is basically an open mic set up. Anyone can do the night, and the audiences who come understand that - because the acts are trying out new material - some elements will work better than others. That way it's less pressure.

CC: How important is it for you to do being doing a full hour show at the Edinburgh Fringe?
NM: Very important, partly to showcase my writing ability to people from all round the world, but also to push myself to write. Because now, if HBO ever offered me a special, I would have a huge repertoire of material! Doing a full hour also allows me space to talk at length about issues that are important to me. And, of course, it's nice hanging out with comics and promoters who you would not necessarily see throughout the year.

Njambi McGrath performs '1 More Dance With My Father' at Laughing Horse at Espionage until 27 Aug.

Hui-Chen Tan: The secret language of NuShu

NuShu was a secret language used for centuries by the women of the Hunan province in China. Deprived a formal education, the women devised the language - and then handed it down from generation to generation - so that they could communicate with and support each other. Intrigued by the story of NuShu, Taiwanese choreographer Tan Hui-Chen of the Water Reflection Dance Ensemble visited the region where the language originated to try and learn it for herself. From that experience she devised her show 'NuShu', which is being performed at Dance Base this Fringe. We spoke to her about this fascinating project.

CC: Tell us what NuShu was and why it existed.
HCT: NuShu is a secret language between women used in the Hunan province of China. It first came to wider attention in the 1980s, but to this day no one has been able to confirm just how long it has been in existence. It originally existed because women were not allowed to be formally educated but they wanted to be able to communicate with each other.

CC: This special language was almost lost. How much of it do we still know and understand today?
HCT: The women who used NuShu on a daily basis have all passed away, though there are still about ten or more descendents of NuShu speakers

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who make an extra effort to learn the language, even though nowadays, because they get to go to school, Mandarin is their main language. There are now also some classes in Hunan where you can learn NuShu, but I don't think they are particularly well-attended

CC: Tell us about your visit to the region where NuShu originated.

HCT: I had only heard people talk about NuShu, but didn't know much about the language itself. I was intrigued, so decided to investigate the possibility of going to Hunan to learn it. I wanted to create a dance work based on NuShu, because I fear it will soon disappear, and hope that my use of body language can help to record it for future generations. I felt that the only way to work out how to portray the language through dance was to live within the community it originated from for a month or so; to learn why the women didn't get any traditional education and how they were nevertheless able to come up with this language; and to find out how the current generation of NuShu women want to pass on this tradition.

CC: What did you learn from your research into NuShu and the women who used it?

HCT: In ancient China, women were often subservient to men; for example, women bound their feet and wore three-inch golden lotus shoes because

men enjoyed watching how they walked. But learning about the NuShu community, and how women created a language, and formed a really spiritual bond and support network through it, definitely changed my view on women being 'soft'. And it made me think about my own memories, when I was young and living in countryside, and I now understand more about my mother's stories and what she was going through.

CC: Tell us more about the show itself.

HCT: The show is a way for me to use dance to share the spiritual side of NuShu. The women in the community find happiness and comfort despite being in a helpless environment where women are viewed as nothing. The women who studied the language were under a lot of pressure, but they felt lucky to have NuShu to communicate with one another, and to have the mental support from others.

CC: Do you have any specific objectives with the piece?

HCT: My journey and exploration radically changed my view on women from this part of the world, because usually in Eastern culture we often think of women having to be obedient to men. So I would like the world to know about this group of strong and knowledgeable women who were enterprising enough to create a language all of their own.

Photo by
Kat Gollock



CC: Tell us more about your company. Why did you set it up and what kind of work do you do?

HCT: I founded Water Reflection Dance Ensemble in 2001 with my husband Choon-Lin Lee, the company manager. I usually create work that is inspired by what I see and what interests me at any one time, though my ambition is to use the arts to connect and communicate different cultures, and

especially women's voices, from around the world.

CC: You performed at the Edinburgh Fringe before. What brings you back?

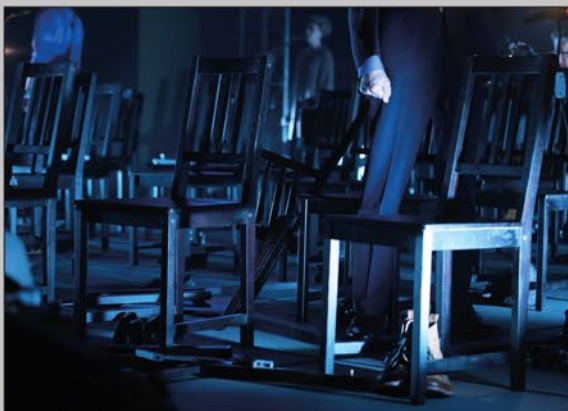
HCT: This is our first time being here for the whole Fringe, and we very much want to use this opportunity to let people know about our work as well as Taiwan's many forms of artistic expression.

CC: You are performing at Dance Base this year - how did your alliance with the team there come about?

HCT: It's so nice to perform in Dance Base and work with their excellent team. Artistic Director Morag Deyes saw our work and wanted very much to bring it here, and we could not refuse!

'NuShu' is on at Dance Base until 28 Aug.

/physical



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CHARLES DICKENS –
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BLOOD FOR BLOOD**

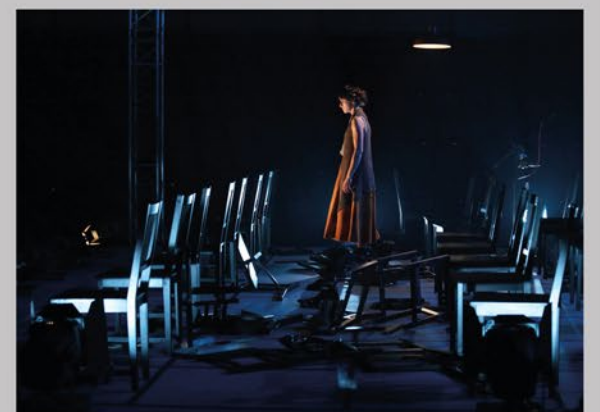
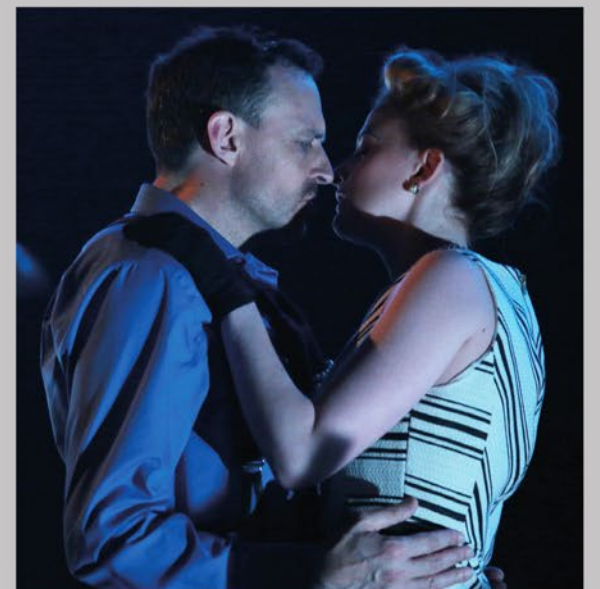
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Goodbear: Sketching out your Fringe day

Having met while both sketching with the Leeds Tealights, Joe Barnes and Henry Perryment arrived at the Fringe as sketch comedy duo Goodbear for the first time last year. They return this Festival at the Bedlam Theatre with a show full of rather strange characters living their lives during one single day. We spoke to both Joe and Henry to find out more.



Photo by David P Scott

CC: So let's start at the very start. How did you guys come to form Goodbear?

Joe: We met about five years ago at Leeds University where we were both members of sketch group the Leeds Tealights.
Henry: We had really similar tastes in comedy, theatre and film, and similar ideas about the kind of things

we wanted to make. So once we had graduated we grabbed each other and decided to put together a double act. And so Goodbear began!

CC: Tell us about the new show.

Joe: It's a character-led sketch comedy show about a selection of really quite strange characters doing stuff all around the world on a single day.
Henry: Oh God it's a lot of fun. I've seen it so many times.

CC: So everything happens on a single day. Which day? And why that concept?

Joe: Each show is set on the date the audience actually sees it. We then look at what people get up to on that one day, however significant or however mundane.
Henry: The concept was appealing because it seemed like a really simple way to present a load of characters whilst giving the show some kind of through-line, and something for the audience to hold onto.

CC: Last year was your first year at the Fringe as Goodbear. How did it go?

Joe: We had a lovely time last year. People came and laughed and we're still friends, so thank God for that!
Henry: It was really good fun! And it was massively useful in figuring out whether our style worked and how to hone it. It was a real learning curve. And we had a laugh!

CC: How does this year's show compare? Did you do anything differently?

Joe: It's a completely new show so content wise it's very different. Tonally, though, we've tried to keep that 'heartwarming' pay-off at the end, which people seemed to like. So

hopefully those who come back will like it!
Henry: We didn't try to change what we were doing too much. Just do it better. Coz we wanna get betta at doin stuff, innit.

CC: Between the two of you, you have also done theatre stuff, stand-up and performed in other sketch groups. How does all that influence the writing and the performing in Goodbear?

Henry: It hugely influences Goodbear. I like the idea that some people walk out of the show not wanting to box us into the sketch comedy genre. We're massively influenced by theatre, music - all the music we use is originally composed by my brother Max - and film. So all those things come into play when writing a new show.
Joe: To be honest, I'm influenced by quite literally everything I see!

CC: You were at Underbelly last year, but are taking to the Bedlam stage this year. Improverts aside, Bedlam is probably better known for its theatre programme. What drew you to the venue?

Henry: The Bedlam seems to be really suiting our show so far. Though we had such a great time at Underbelly last year. I suppose with the way the show developed this year we felt that it would suit the Bedlam stage best.
Joe: Our show's massively influenced by theatre so it made a lot of sense to perform there. That big stage and all the lighting mean you can create a real sense of atmosphere too.
Henry: There's comfy seats and cheap beers as well, if anyone's wondering...

Goodbear perform at Bedlam Theatre until 28 Aug.

Holly&Ted: C

In 'Pond Wife', theatrical duo Holly&Ted take the Little Mermaid and transform her into the kind of hero who could save a pop star. The result is a traditional fairytale with plenty of pop tunes and dance moves from the 1990s and 2000s. We threw some questions over to both Holly and Ted, and these were their answers...

CM: Okay, let's begin with the basics - who are you guys?

H&T: We're a collaborative duo who work together to create theatre that focuses on strong women. We work entirely collaboratively, sharing devising, writing, directing and performing duties, as well as supporting each other both on and off stage.

CM: Without giving too much away, tell us a bit about 'Pond Wife'.

H&T: 'Pond Wife' is loosely based on 'The Little Mermaid', but we were also inspired by seminal moments in pop culture - such as Britney's breakdown and Kesha's trial against Dr Luke. We wanted to take a fictional character, like the Little Mermaid, who is typically weak and gives up her voice for a man she's never met, and make her a hero who could save a pop star.

CM: So definite feminist themes?

H&T: We've tried to make the themes of strength in sisterhood and following your heart the strongest parts of 'Pond Wife'. We want to encourage young women to help each other to achieve their dreams, and not compete against one another. Feminism was always going to be a clear theme in our work as it is something we are so passionate about, however we wanted to break these down further.

CM: What inspired the project?

H&T: Whilst researching the different versions of 'The Little Mermaid' we



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were listening to pop music and found so many concurrent themes, such as waiting around for a man, or not knowing what to say to a man, which fit perfectly with the original tale. Then when we juxtaposed these against some incredible songs about independence we began to realise where our version of the story would take us.

CM: What made you use Hans Christian Anderson as a jumping off point in the first place? Are you fans of his work?

H&T: I think everyone is a fan of Hans Anderson, aren't they? Along with the Brothers Grimm and Charles Perrault, he basically reinvented storytelling, and what was appropriate for a children's story. The original 'Little Mermaid' is a heartbreaking tale of lost love, inspired by Anderson's own life. We chose 'The Little Mermaid' because we knew we wanted to work with a fairy story, we knew we wanted to reinvent it with a feminist twist, and we thought that she was possibly the weakest female character.

CM: Where do you stand on the Disney version of 'The Little Mermaid'?

H&T: The Disney film is a very sanitised version of the original story, with a happy ending and adorable sea creature companions. But it's completely brilliant in its own way. It may no longer be a heartbreaking story of lost love and loneliness, but it has some great tunes, and Ariel's dad is super hot.

CM: The show is described as both funny and feminist, which some asses would regard as impossible! What would you say to those who are put off by feminist discourse and think that feminists are humourless?

H&T: To put it simply - they're wrong. Ted used to hate stand-up comedy until he started working at Soho Theatre and started to see a wider range of comedians than the straight white males that are so often pushed

forward by mainstream media. Women have a wider range of unexplored and unexpected experiences to draw from which is often going to be funnier than the privilege of being a cis man. I mean if you can't find the humour in our attempts to lip sync to 90s pop music, where can you?

CM: Do you think it's possible to change people's attitudes via theatre? Do you think you could convert a non-feminist with your approach?

H&T: Theatre is an incredibly powerful medium, because it asks you to empathise and identify with a human being sharing the same immediate space as you. If you can put yourself in their shoes, and believe their experiences, it can change the way you see the world once you've left the theatre. Obviously it's harder to get a 'non-feminist' - we prefer the term 'misogynist' - to come see a feminist show, but if you can get them through the doors... anything can happen!

CM: You're newcomers to the Edinburgh Fringe. What are you expecting?

H&T: We've been touring different fringes with the show for a while, so we're hoping Edinburgh will give us a boost in terms of audience engagement and company profile. It would be amazing if in a few years time people got excited about seeing 'the new Holly&Ted show'.

CM: Is there 'a new Holly&Ted show' in the pipeline? And what next for 'Pond Wife'?

H&T: What's next for 'Pond Wife' kinda depends, because as a small unfunded company we've potentially reached the limits of what we're able to achieve with this on our own. But if a venue comes along and enjoys it, or a producer is looking for a tour... who knows! Either way, we've already started researching our next show which is very different from 'Pond Wife', but with a similar sensibility.

'Pond Wife' is on at Underbelly Cowgate until 28 Aug.



/theatre

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Martha McBrier: Back at the Fringe with stories to share

Martha McBrier enjoyed much acclaim for her stand-up shows at the Fringe over a decade ago, but then she stepped back from performing for a number of years.

But she has reappeared on the Edinburgh stage more recently, initially with her self-penned children's shows, and last year with 'Pigeon Puncher', in which her comedy was combined with the art of storytelling. She returns this month to the Free Festival with 'Japanese Boy', recalling the time she took a group of mental health patients to compete in a pool tournament.

We caught up with Martha to discuss her comedy, her return and this year's story and the themes it explores.

CC: We first saw you at the Fringe like a decade ago, but then you took a break for a few years before returning with the children's shows, and then 'Pigeon Puncher'. What made you come back to the Fringe?

MM: I stopped performing when my hearing worsened. I couldn't banter because I couldn't hear the responses. You can't be a good improviser if you have to keep asking the audience to repeat themselves. People thought I was playing for time, or just rubbish. It was a huge thing in my life to lose my hearing and I wasn't prepared for the impact. It pervaded every area of my life and very gradually, I lost confidence. I had other parts of my condition to deal with as well. It's taken a long time to come to terms with it all and I still get upset if I can't hear. But I love the Edinburgh Fringe. There's nothing like it. And I have never performed much out-with the Fringe; people have always assumed that I was more involved in the comedy industry than I actually was.

CC: You said that 'Pigeon Puncher' was in part the result of discovering the art of storytelling. How are the new story-based shows different to the old stand-up shows?

MM: I love a good narrative arc, me. All of the comedians I admire are great story tellers; Billy Connolly, Mike Birbiglia, Daniel Kitson, Matt Price, Sarah Kendall. You don't need to interact whilst telling stories. I'd never done that before; I'd never written a script, or even particularly written a set. So this was new, but I discovered I really like it. People do love a good story. My partner - yarntastic, loveable Cornish giant, Matt Price - has been a huge inspiration and has encouraged me. He has always been a storyteller and now it seems to be fashionable.

CC: Tell us about the story you're sharing in 'Japanese Boy'.

MM: I worked in mental health for six years in the 1980s and started a pool league with a group of schizophrenics. It's definitely a tale of the triumph of the underdog. I've wanted to tell this story for a while - it's funny and sad - though I originally thought it would be a play. I can still remember vividly the patients, the hospital smells and the staff. I think it was the best job I ever had; I learned so much and had the most amazing interactions with people.

CC: It feels that recently people have become slightly more open in discussing mental health. Would you agree?

MM: There's still far too much stigma. So anytime anyone talks about any health issue, particularly mental health, it really makes a difference. And there needs to be more emphasis on mental well-being. I believe it should be a priority and there needs to be more services. Actually, really, everyone can relate to mental ill-health, even if it's grief, or anxiety, or low self-esteem, and we all know what it's like to lose the plot. But it's important that people get away from the 'Beautiful Mind' view of mental health. I look at the West of Scotland, working class reality. Because any health issue is easier when you have money. That's a sociological fact. You're welcome.

CC: Is it a challenge getting the balance right when doing a comedy show about mental health?

MM: Yes, because you don't want to appear as though you're making fun of someone's torment. As I say, I've wanted to tell this story for a while. I wanted to talk about the issues in mental health that you hear less about, particularly schizophrenia. It's told with love and respect. When patients were

stable they could talk to me about their symptoms and even laugh about it. Humour can work everywhere. And I have to say, comedians are the craziest group of people I have ever encountered.

CC: You mentioned the banter in your old shows. You use to be well known for riffing with the audience and sometimes improvising pretty much the entire show. I assume the new shows are more tightly scripted. Do you still interact with the audience?

MM: The show is structured, yes; it has a beginning, a middle and an end. To be honest, I have been doing a wee smidgen of interacting and responding to things that happen. I can't help it. It's important to me to make a connection with people; that probably stems from my work background. Though you can riff all you want to, but not all audiences want to be rifees.

CC: You've obviously had a very interesting life outside of comedy and performing. Do you think that helps when writing comedy? Should young comedians be trying to get some proper life experiences to make them better comics?

MM: Well, I think everybody's life is interesting. I am very deep today! I think if you have a talent for the comedic, you can make any experience funny, however mundane, especially if you're a keen observer of human behaviour. So while most comedians do get better with age, there's comedy to be found in the smallest things. Because people are ridiculous, especially when they're trying not to be. In the 1970s Billy Connolly had a hilarious routine about having an itchy bahookie, a beautiful Scottish word for bottom. And writer/



Photo by Steve Ullathorne

performers like Victoria Wood and Caroline Aherne could make ordering soup and sitting on a sofa funny. How awful to have lost both of them.

CC: I mentioned the children's shows you did. How does performing for children compare to performing for older audiences?

MM: Doing children's shows had been a long-standing ambition. I have performed two of four shows I've written in the 'Very Scariesome' series - 'The Very Scariesome Lollipop Lady' and 'The Very Scariesome Tooth Fairy' - which I am planning to turn into books. I'm interested in what makes children afraid. Children are as varied as adults, but I think more honest. In one show I asked who has a dog. One wee boy's hand shot up. He then told the crowd he had a dog, but it had to be kept at his grans till his dad got out of jail. You seldom get freedom of expression like that from adults! I said, "your gran sounds great". He was pleased. Kids believe their life is perfectly okay until someone tells them different.

CC: You performed at various Edinburgh Fringe venues back in the day. What drew you to the Free Festival?

MM: It's a brilliant idea and without doubt, offers opportunities to performers without them losing thousands of pounds. The public seem keen on it too. It has allowed someone like me with no agent and no PR to do a show. That was the original ethos of the Fringe. And with the calibre of performers doing free shows - the magnificent Brendon Burns, no less! - audiences can see something that's every bit as good as they'll see in a paid-ticket venue. So there.

CC: Are there any previously untold stories from your life that you reckon could be the inspiration for future Edinburgh shows?

MM: That would (literally) be telling...

Martha McBrier performs 'Japanese Boy' at Laughing Horse at Finnegan's Wake until 27 Aug.

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CABARET

Peter And Bambi Heaven – The Magic Inside (Sharon Burgess Productions)

In 'The Magic Inside', Peter And Bambi Heaven take care to play to your expectations to the point of parody, before subverting them almost immediately. Asher Treleaven as Peter is Will Ferrell-esque with a hint of Austin Powers, while Bambi (played by Gypsy Wood) is a doe-eyed ex-cage dancer now "living the dream". Their energy is enormous, their physical comedy hugely creative, and their jokes increasingly surreal throughout the show. Occasionally there were misogynistic reactions on Peter's part and, while of course they were playing characters, the jokes themselves felt unnecessary and rooted in sexism (did we really need another men-find-periods-disgusting joke?) But mostly, 'The Magic Inside' is an immensely enjoyable and hugely inventive cabaret.

Assembly George Square Gardens, until 28 Aug | tw rating 3/5 | [Nina Keen]

COMEDY

Chris Gethard: Career Suicide (PBJ Management in association with AGI Entertainment and APA Agency)

The flyer promises depression, alcoholism and attempted suicide. And, as they say in Gethard's native USA, he totally goes there. As such, with grim scatological summaries of the side effects of certain medications, this won't be for everyone. It is still a comedy show, however, and on that level it's a success, with Gethard's easy stage manner leavening the confessional moments, with entertaining anecdotes about some of his excessive behaviour and his various attempts to address it. As Gethard reminds us, there are those who still don't understand that depression is an illness rather than a lifestyle choice, and many inconsistencies in how those affected are treated in every sense of the word. So, thinking about it, maybe this should be for everyone.

Pleasance Dome, until 29 Aug | tw rating 4/5 | [Bruce Blacklaw]

Ed Gamble: Stampede

Ed Gamble delivers a strong hour of stand-up, which is surprising considering how much of it is about cauliflower. The routine mostly centres around Gamble's attempts at, and frustration with, clean eating, a topic so relatable it immediately gets the audience on board. But it's not just that the material is sound, as Gamble's commanding, energetic stage presence and on-the-spot funniness carry him through even when a joke doesn't easily land. The latter half of the show is where he really hits his stride though – his delivery becomes smoother and more confident as he comes into his strongest material. 'Stampede' is a fun and funny show that starts slow but builds up to a full pelt.

Gilded Balloon at the Counting House, until 29 Aug | tw rating 4/5 | [Patricia-Ann Young]

Eric Lampaert – Alien Of Extraordinary Ability

The first part of Eric Lampaert's new show comprises well-observed and fairly straightforward material on the well-trodden comedic ground of cultural differences, winning the

audience onside immediately with Apollo-ready material. But as the show develops, it grows into anything but standard. Material that started off nowhere near as "weird" as his own persona seems to grow, and soon we're watching a hilarious, unique show with a huge variety of styles of humour blended so seamlessly they often all fit into one bit. Lampaert's character is complex too, a blend of self-deprecation, ironic hubris and occasional nutjobbery, with self-references sparse enough for each one to be belly-laugh hilarious.

Laughing Horse @ City Cafe, until 28 Aug | tw rating 4/5 | [Nina Keen]

Goodbear (DugOut Theatre)

Hilarious duo Goodbear zip through the some of the biggest moments in their characters' lives in this highly polished hour of comedy. It's a series of sketches loosely tied together by the aforementioned theme – important days in the life of a vast array of colourful personalities – and the pair rely on tightly choreographed sound and lighting cues to hit comedic notes with a impressive professional deftness. Their dynamic together is however the strongest part of the show, with Henry Perryment's talent for delivery beautifully complemented by Joe Barnes' well timed physical comedy – he can have the audience in stitches with as little as a highly arched eyebrow. An excellent show that clearly demonstrates that good sketch comedy needs off-the-chart chemistry to make it side splittingly funny.

Bedlam Theatre, until 28 Aug | tw rating 4/5 | [Patricia-Ann Young]

Le Bossu (withWings)

withWings certainly have quite the reputation to uphold, having had a sell-out run and a smattering of five star reviews with previous show 'The Duck Pond', and 'Le Bossu' certainly does not disappoint. When enchanting Esmerelda comes to Paris, the entire city is enthralled, even Archdeacon Claude Frolo who, driven mad by lust, loses his faith to temptation. As funny as it is heartbreaking, this mesmerising retelling of 'The Hunchback of Notre Dame' perfectly blends tragedy with humour. Whilst physical theatre can be a risk, here it is beautifully staged, working effortlessly to shed insight into the inner workings of the mind of Quasimodo. The fantastic original music will still be playing in your head days later. Seriously seductive, 'Le Bossu' is a must-see.

Bedlam Theatre, until 21 Aug | tw rating 4/5 | [Rosie Barrett]

Robert Newman: The Brain Show (Phil McIntyre Entertainments)

Robert Newman has a bee in his bonnet. And cephalopods on his stage, but that's another story (which also has Jean Michel Jarre in it). His bugbear is brainless interpretations of brain science, which he started reading up on after taking part in a brain imaging study and being cross at the result. He skips through some modern popular 'science', Freud, Sartre, Darwin, Newton

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and, er, Paul Weller, via a turn on the ukulele, some character comedy and impressions. It sounds like a lot to get through in an hour and actually it probably is - not all of the gags or the ideas have time to develop as they might, but overall it's good, brainy stuff. And it's funny.

Summerhall, until 28 Aug | tw rating 4/5 | [Bruce Blacklaw]

Simon Munnery: Standing Still (Show And Tell)

Although certain parts of 'Standing Still' were really funny, most of it was crushingly disappointing. Most of the first section was essentially a history lecture and a rant about capitalism, but unfortunately being right about something doesn't

make it automatically funny. His later joke about his daughter not being old enough for make-up was strangely reactionary as well as deeply uncomfortable, and a lot of the better jokes were also a few years old. 'Standing Still' did have its moments; the final joke about skiing enthusiasts on a first date served as an unfortunately pertinent reminder of why Munnery is one of my all-time favourites. It's a shame these reminders were so few and far between.

The Stand Comedy Club, until 29 Aug | tw rating 2/5 | [Nina Keen]

10 Things I Hate About UKIP (Joe Wells / PBH's Free Fringe)

This year, Joe Wells' intelligent political

comedy has taken a turn for the bleak as fuck. He begins with a rant about UKIP and how "everything is fucked," followed by a consciously simplistic explanation of why right-wingers are bad and left-wingers are good. He then subverts this simplicity by exploring the inner turmoil that comes with being left wing, while weaving in smart political points. Coming to the show as a leftie, these jokes feel like ones we've been waiting to hear, so they're seldom surprising, but they're always well-written, likeable and, crucially, sensitive. He handles heavy topics with the care they require and shows comedy doesn't need to harm people: indeed, it's all the better for not doing so.

T-Bar, until 27 Aug | tw rating 3/5 | [Nina Keen]



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Pierre Novellie Is Cool Peter (CKP)

I am almost embarrassed by the amount of involuntary noise that came out of my face during Pierre Novellie's hysterically funny show. This old-before-his-time comedian's style has hints of Tony Law's joyful silliness, as he begins his set with a gleeful put-down of some persistent hecklers. He talks honestly about his depression, about his nerdy teenage pursuits, his continuing video game addiction and his South African heritage. His overriding theme is his attempt to be more laid back, whether it's better to be "cool and sad, or happy and a nerd", though his glorious phrasing suggests there's nothing laid back about his incredibly precise script. A genuinely hilarious comedian, Novellie seems pretty cool to me.

Pleasance Courtyard, until 28 Aug | tw rating 5/5 | [Gemma Scott]

Thrones! The Musical Parody (Baby Wants Candy)

'Game of Thrones' is such a huge phenomenon that you could slap its name on a roped-off turd and it would still attract avid fans for a look. So it's refreshing to discover that this parody musical is so much better than it ever had to be. 'Thrones!' is jam packed with clever jokes, visual gags, catchy songs and a lot of heart, clearly coming from a place of love for the TV show and books. Every member of the cast is excellent and hilarious, but Chris Grace's touching ode to a popular bygone character is a complete stand-out. Its source material might often be bleak, but this fan service musical is anything but.

Assembly George Square Studios, until 29 Aug | tw rating 5/5 | [Patricia-Ann Young]

mourning opened with Richard Wagner in gentle mood, with 'Siegfried's Idyll', his tribute to his wife and new son. There was only one of each instrument so everyone was a soloist, and they were all superb. Unusually there was no percussion, so double bass and cello were a vital partnership. Song cycle 'Das Lied von der Erde (Song of the Earth)' was written a year after the death of composer Gustav Mahler's child, and the spicy orchestration of this arrangement included celesta, harmonium, mandolin and unusual piano techniques. Mezzo-soprano Alice Coote drew the audience in with her confiding singing - a telling of truths, whilst tenor Stewart Skelton blustered magnificently in drunken denial.

The Queen's Hall, 6 Aug | tw rating 4/5 | [Louise Rodgers]

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International Festival)

Passion and excitement emanated from the Orchestra dell'Accademia

Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in the first half comprising of Shakespearean themed opera pieces. Gioachino Rossini's 'Otello, overture' was disconcertingly cheeky for a tragedy but such was the custom of the early eighteenth century! Later, the orchestra assumed a dark intensity for Rossini's choral masterpiece, 'Stabat Mater'. The Edinburgh Festival Chorus gave everything to this performance; it was confident and assured, conveying the majestically tragic beginning of one of the world's great religions. The soloists swooped and soared alone and together; they sang both as a perfectly blended ensemble and shone powerfully during their solos. Santa Cecilia, patron saint of music for whom the orchestra was named, was present tonight.

Usher Hall, 7 Aug | tw rating 4/5 | [Louise Rodgers]

MUSICALS

Buzz: A New Musical (Fat Rascal Theatre)

Who knew a musical about female masturbation was something we needed so desperately? 'Buzz' pays homage to the history and science that have enabled the sexual liberation for which main character Angie searches. Attempting to make empowering art is risky though, and unfortunately 'Buzz' just misses the mark. It's hard to stomach a 'feminist' show so dated

in its humour and attitudes that it calls a gay character "hardly male" and 'liberates' its main character by having her punch her ex. The historical musical numbers were often brilliant, particularly the part about Masters and Johnson, and the ending was infectious in its joy. But just because it's a show about history doesn't excuse it from outdated attitudes.

Greenside @ Infirmary Street, until 27 Aug | tw rating 2/5 | [Nina Keen]

Holmes For Rent (Music Theatre Warwick)

Against the backdrop of Victorian melodrama, a battle of egos threatens to break apart the most beloved of hero-sidekick partnerships. Dr Watson stages an impromptu play to convince us that Holmes is merely a decoy and that he is the true mastermind... but Moriarty is waiting in the wings to disrupt the show. Whilst the play is light-hearted and enjoyable, it lacks real depth, and amid a culture gripped with Sherlock mania, 'Holmes For Rent' lacks the originality to compete in a fringe scene overcrowded with adaptations. The play boasts an alternative ending each night, but this leaves the final scene chaotic and rushed, with many questions unanswered. Robert Madge deserves praise, however, for his flamboyant, charismatic interpretation of Holmes.

C Venue 24, until 29 Aug | tw rating 3/5 | [Rosie Barrett]

Tomorrow, Maybe (ACJ Productions)

Set in a local coffee shop, 'Tomorrow, Maybe' tells the stories - through a series of vignettes - of the familiar faces we pass by each day: their loves, losses, dreams and disillusionments. A thoroughly modern musical exploring thoroughly modern themes, the show is heart-warming, familiar, and laugh out loud funny, casting an extraordinary light on ordinary lives. The production boasts an exceptionally talented cast, with performances that would be more at home on a Broadway stage than a tiny room at the Edinburgh Fringe. The musical numbers are exceptional, and the harmonies will send shivers down your spine. A delight more than

deserving of the critical acclaim it has already received. Faultless.

C Nova, until 29 Aug | tw rating 5/5 | [Rosie Barrett]

THEATRE

Captured (White Slate Theatre)

Sparse staging and projected photographs enhance the impact of this taut two-hander. The story of two ex-lovers reconnecting, one a photographer, the other his erstwhile subject, is wonderfully rich; the depth and texture to the characters is a testament both to the naturalistic dialogue and the actors' committed performances. The big questions about art - can a photographer both

chronicle a relationship, and live it? - are wrapped up in more pressing, more personal questions about Sophie and Isaac's relationship: can he stop trying to shape her into his vision, can she stop worrying about how she is perceived? Gripping and moving, this play walks the artistic tightrope well. Like a perfect photograph it offers something both beautifully composed and emotionally authentic.

Underbelly Cowgate, until 28 Aug | tw rating 4/5 | [Andy Leask]


Deal With The Dragon (First Sprout Theatre)

If a gay German dragon offered to handle the difficult things in your life, you'd say yes, right? Frustrated artist Hunter did, and in Kevin Rolston's

TWO KITTENS & A KID

A GAY MAN RAISING HIS INNER DIVA

written & performed by
Christopher Wilson



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(not 7, 14)

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Royal Mile
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5/5



Photo by
Karla Gowett

Sofie Hagen: Shimmer Shatter (Sofie Hagen / PBH's Free Fringe)

"I hope you didn't come wanting to be cheered up", Sofie Hagen jokes near the end of her set, about love and rejection with a touch of mental illness, aka what Sofie Hagen does best. Hyper self-aware and enormously insightful, she weaves this year's stories expertly in and out of each other with immense narrative talent, every arc and every joke crafted to perfection. Her masterful delivery often reflects her confident ownership of her own pain, and she's brilliant at doing 'creepy' jokes without actually making people uncomfortable. No wonder she had to turn away about twice the room's capacity at the door; word must be getting out that she's one of the best comics you could hope to see.

Liquid Room Annexe, until 28 Aug | tw rating 5/5 | [Nina Keen]

5/5



**Photo by
Ryan Jensen**

Ghost Quartet (Ghost Quartet)

Dave Malloy's 'Ghost Quartet' feels like a dream and a nightmare: overwhelmingly beautiful, complex, soulful and gripping. I'm still not sure what it's about though, as the narrative itself is kept purposefully vague. From song to song unravel interwoven stories of death, loss and haunting, centred around two women, Rose and Pearl, and their consecutive reincarnations. This emotional resonance is backed up by incredibly talented musical orchestration. The show brilliantly oscillates between musical genres, displaying an incredible variety of instruments and stunning vocal abilities. It has the soul-shaking quality of gospel, the purity of a capella and lyrical singing, the disturbance of Gothic novels, all wrapped up with a modern twist. Absolutely lost for words.

Roundabout@Summerhall, until 28 Aug | tw rating 5/5 | [Pénélope Hervouet]

one-man show he has to live with the consequences. Writer and actor Rolston skilfully draws distinctive and memorable characters, and in the standout scene, where Hunter's art rival Gandy tells his rehab story, he is simply superb. His Gandy is endearing but pitiful, funny but mannered – a mess of deeply human contradictions whom I could have watched for an hour. The show itself is similar parts flawed and admirable: its story is delightfully weird, but overly digressive and doesn't quite fill its seventy minutes. Still, Rolston's skill as an actor should not be understated.

C Nova, until 29 Aug | tw rating 3/5 | [Jon Stapley]

**Erik Satie's - Faction
(Avalon Promotions Ltd)**

What goes on inside a genius composer's mind? In this intimate and introspective piece, Alistair McGowan skilfully juggles music and speech as he brings to life the Nineteenth Century French composer Erik Satie. Somewhere between theatre, concert, spoken word and comedy, this unique piece offers a heartfelt, face-to-face insight into the man behind the artist. Excerpts of letters, poems and reflections from the composer are crafted into an hour-long monologue, punctuated by stunning renditions of some Satie's most famous compositions such as 'Gymnopédies'. McGowan's portrayal was understated at times, yet managed to convey the composer's delicate, troubled and anxiety-ridden personality. Classical music lovers rejoice!

Pleasance Courtyard, until 25 Aug | tw rating
3/5 | [Pénélope Hervouet]

Frankenstein (Canny Creatures and Fringe Management)

Like Frankenstein's creature, this adaptation of Shelley's novel is crudely stitched together and the seams are bursting. Condensing the text to one hour was always going to be hard, but rather than compress the action, focusing on a few key scenes, instead we embark on a breathless race through the plot, never alighting anywhere long enough to catch our breath. Combined with often melodramatic performances, this robs the characters of all pathos. Worse still, the already overstuffed narrative is further muddled by a romantic subplot between Henry and Elizabeth, and by the creature's attempts to wear the faces of Frankenstein's family, like a bargain basement Hannibal Lecter. I found myself, like Victor, lamenting the creation of this grotesque monstrosity.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, until 29 Aug | tw rating
1/5 | [Andy Leask]

Frenemies (Sedos)

Frenemies is a show that doesn't seem to know who its real frenemies are. A collection of sketches each written by a different writer explore a range of 'frenemy' scenarios, like two shipwrecked men stuck on a raft, or the horror of having a bitchy sister-in-law, but because each sketch is no longer than ten minutes long, none manage to capture a true, slow burning, death-by-a-thousand-cuts, toxic friendship. Having so many writers also means the show lacks one coherent voice, which leaves the show feeling disjointed, especially as the quality of the writing varies from sketch to sketch. Excellent comedic

timing from the energetic cast elevates the uneven script and lands some solid laughs, but disappointing writing and

poor structure makes the show its own worst frenemy.

Greenside @ Infirmary Street, until 13 Aug | tw
rating 2/5 | [Patricia-Ann Young]

Made Up (Fast Food Collective)

Do I have something in my teeth? What underwear am I wearing again?' 'Made Up' gives a hysterically unglamorous account of your average club night. It's an energetic, youthful piece that tackles the common issues of nightlife – heartbreak, seduction, drugs – as we follow four girls attempting to make the most of their evening. What follows is spot-on in its portrayal of teenage anxieties, such as Kate's 'FOMO' (Fear of Missing Out), or the emotions of the heartbroken Ashley, who claims she loves being single. 'Made Up' is fun, insightful, unpretentious and completely relatable, whether you still hit the dance-floor every weekend or if wild, endless nights of partying are now but a hazy memory.

Underbelly Cowgate, until 28 Aug | tw rating
4/5 | [Pénélope Hervouet]

Northanger Abbey (Box Tale Soup)

Jane Austen with puppets - how quintessentially Edinburgh Fringe. This premise allows performers Antonia Christophers and Noel Byrne to pilfer Austen's vast range of quirky characters with aplomb, only putting the puppets down to act as the romantic leads Catherine and Henry. The puppets are a charming oddity that allow both actors to display their

range, but they do bring a childish quality to a story that certainly isn't for children. The clash between the puppet gimmick and the narrative becomes increasingly grating, but there is still plenty here for lovers of Austen's work, nailing her wry humour whilst also being sweetly romantic. An interesting take on a classic, 'Northanger Abbey' is ultimately as charming as it is jarring.

Underbelly Cowgate, until 28 Aug | tw rating
3/5 | [Patricia-Ann Young]

Shakespeare In The Garden: Twelfth Night, Or What You Will (C Theatre)

Charming as ever, Shakespeare In The Garden returns to the Fringe to breathe folkly new life into another of the Bard's classic comedies. Ukuleles, flower crowns, and functioning VW camper vans could have made this adaptation of 'Twelfth Night' too twee to function, but director Oliver Stephens strips it back and allows the garden at St. Peter's to create the desired whimsical, romantic feel. It's also really, really funny due to solid comical performances from all the cast, the stand-outs being Sydney Aldridge's dry Maria and Jonathon Cobb's scenery chewing Malvolio. Being so close to a main road does occasionally break the spell the production sets up for itself, but endearing surroundings and charming performances make it a joy to watch.

C South, until 29 Aug | tw rating 4/5 | [Patricia-Ann Young]



5/5

**Mairi Campbell: Pulse
(Greengold Projects
and Authentic Artist
Collective)**

"Fall in love with Scotland. Take your time." That's the advice Mairi Campbell's grandmother gave her, and these words also encapsulate the audience's experience in 'Pulse': a slow but deep falling in love alongside Campbell as she searches for her voice. Through music, theatre, poetry and movement, Campbell weaves a carefully detailed story of her relationship with music and her culture. From the first moment of this journey, the award-winning Scottish musician's bare and unabashed honesty captivates you, and every time she plays the viola, an unspoken sense of belonging inundates the room. Even if you've never heard her music before, or never listened to Scottish folklore, by the end of 'Pulse' you'll feel transformed.

Summerhall, until 28 Aug | tw
rating 5/5 | [Aida Rocci]

Some of our favourite Fringe performers share words, thoughts and maybe even some wisdom...



We also enjoy using the idea that the puppets live in our world and are aware of their status as puppets. We often refer to the puppeteers and the virtuosic performances rather than trying to hide them, pretend they aren't there or have the puppets live in a spate 'puppet world.'

If you see Boris & Sergey out and about be sure to introduce yourselves. I can guarantee you will have a good time, although you may come to regret it later.

'Boris & Sergey's Preposterous Improvisation Experiment' is on at the Assembly George Square Theatre Omnitorium until 28 Aug.

/theatre

Henry Maynard: Darkness and puppets

I think it's fair to say that Flabbergast Theatre have wowed Team ThreeWeeks at recent festivals with their brilliant 'Boris & Sergey' shows, in which the titular puppets cause plenty of mayhem. The shows arguably push the boundaries of what puppetry can be, which is very much the aim of the company, as Flabberghast's Henry Maynard explains...

Puppetry performances can often be seen as purely children's entertainment and they sometimes stray onto the twee side of things, but at Flabbergast we have been interested in exploring puppetry for adults since our inception.

That is not to say that there aren't a great many family-orientated puppetry shows that are indeed excellent - and some can also be quite dark. However, we are interested in making performances that are not hindered by the sensibilities of parents with regard to what their children are exposed to.

We take an irreverent approach to our subject matters and try to dispense with pretension (the other trap), unless

it is a characteristic of one of the puppets. We deal with the gamut of human experience, touching on pathos, whilst maintaining a healthy dose of hilarity. That said, we are sticklers when it comes to technique and are proud of our puppeteers' dedication to detail.

Puppetry is a magical art form with huge potential and punching power and we think that it's a shame that the overriding opinion - other than those in the know - is that it is only for children.

We aim to engage the 18-99 bracket and our flagship characters Boris & Sergey have inspired a loyal following for their debaucheries and antics. When we improvise on stage with our puppets, we do not always do so in the typical way that requires structure and games to work.

In our latest installment of the Boris & Sergey Saga, the Balkan Bad-Boys walk onto stage with absolutely nothing planned and allow the strength of their characters, relationships and the skill of the six puppeteers to carry them through a hilarious hour of madcap shenanigans.

Because we do such a great deal of improvisation with Boris & Sergey they have grown and developed over the past six years into very complex characters that we feel express all the idiosyncrasies and contradictions of real people.

Puppets are also given a certain license by people, certainly more so than a human being, which means that the characters can be more abhorrent, violent or inappropriate yet still be loveable. You can go further and push more boundaries; often the person(s) operating the puppet are not associated as being responsible for the puppet's actions lending a unique dynamic to interaction.

President Klintnick's pointing at pie charts and the tanks are rolling in.
But then one Scot's not looking for anything that lasts...

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Bob Slayer: A Heroes perspective on the evolving comedy Fringe

Debate about the commercialisation of the Edinburgh Fringe is nothing new, though that discussion evolves, and in recent years, the relationship between the free show strands and the paid-for venues has been a big talking point.

In amongst all that Bob Slayer has been building his network of Heroes venues which reinvented 'free' as 'pay what you want', while also seeking new ways to champion the independent comedy community, and the innovative and alternative comedy acts - veteran and new - who reside there.

As his 2016 season gets under way, Bob reviews the comedy Fringe landscape as he sees it...

As the Edinburgh Fringe got under way this month, the 'ones to watch' lists in various publications were again full of acts who are performing in the three Heroes venues. It

is wonderful to see but also ridiculous that over the past five years the big venues have let a barely sober man slowly 'steal' all the best acts... Why is this? Well it's equal parts what we have done right and how much they continue to get wrong...

The current comedy industry was created off the back of the act-led revolution that was Alternative Comedy. As comedy became big business, so agents, producers, venues etc took over. But for a long time they haven't been listening to what punters and performers have been crying out for, particularly at the Fringe... We know this because they consistently tell us so.

Like any creative business, the corporate comedy industry likes to encourage competition: "Show us how much you really want to Make It". This immediately puts the performer in a subservient position, perpetuating a self-serving system that thrives on haves and have-nots. Spendthrifts are rewarded. Artists' money is wasted. And the risk-averse industry is always looking for near copies of previously successful acts, so that there feels like a quota of anything outside the perceived norm.

There is little motivation within this environment to assist developing performers to actually earn a living. In fact performers are routinely told: "Don't expect to make money at the Fringe" and "You need to invest in your career..." Everything is focused on aspiring to become a 'star'. The end result is that although more money is generated through punters being charged higher ticket prices, this money tends

to end up in the pockets of third parties, with most Fringe performers being lucky to break even.

Contrast this with the independent scene which encourages creativity, cooperation, and resourcefulness. As this grows and more alternative networks are established - including independent venues, clubs, promoters, fanzines and fans - then there are better outlets for comedians to develop confidence and connect with an audience.

The new, exciting and boldly different are all highly prized, and comedy legends that the industry often seems to pass by are respected, and they can find a place where they can continue to grow and reinvent themselves. Importantly, the greater efficiency of independent comedy leads to cheaper tickets and yet, with fewer people taking a cut, there is more chance for performers to actually make an income. Independent comedy puts creativity and punters first.

So as more and more comedians demand to be treated like individuals and alternative models like Pay What You Want are steadily spreading across the Fringe, a subtle shake-up is happening. We live in interesting times. Support independent comedy.

Bob Slayer is performing 24 different shows at this year's Fringe with 'Bob Slayer: 24 Hours' on the Heroes @ Bob's BlundaBus until 29 Aug.

He is also producing 'Iraq Out & Loud: Reading The Chilcot Report In Full', which is set to be a Guinness World Record for the longest continuous 'show' ever performed!

Recipe Corner: Cooking With Yeti's - Scottish Edition

Psychedelic-clown-musical-sketch-comedy duo Yeti's (who you might also recognise as EastEnd Cabaret) are bringing their debut show to the Pleasance Courtyard this year, inviting you to spend an hour propping up the bar at the strangest little dive in town!

Promising a cast of characters to rival the Addams Family - from the overly-amorous yeti who owns the bar, to a sleazy severed head and some cosmic rock stars called the Psychedelic Nuns - there's sure to be plenty of dark and delicious sketch as well as some relentlessly catchy songs.

To celebrate their new show, the duo have put together some Fringe-flavoured recipes for their very own three-course meal - with a very Yeti twist!

Starter: Tequila-Baked Scotch Eyeballs (Eggs)

The perfect Scottish entrée to kick things off with a bang.

Ingredients:

1 bottle of tequila
400g (14 oz) sausage meat
6 hard-boiled cow eyeballs (or eggs, if there are no eyeballs available)
7 tablespoons fine dried breadcrumbs
1 egg, beaten

Method:

1. Have a shot of tequila.
2. Divide sausage into six

equal portions. Lightly sprinkle breadcrumbs on to a clean surface, pat out each sausage portion to about .25cm (1/8 in) thickness. Wrap portions completely around each of the eyeballs/hard boiled eggs, pressing edges together to seal.
3. Have another shot of tequila.
4. Dip sausage-coated eye/eggs in beaten egg, then roll in breadcrumbs. Place on baking tray and bake in preheated 190 C / gas mark 5 oven until lightly browned, about 25 minutes.
5. Finish the tequila while you wait. You will be in a very good mood to start the party.
Tip: To prevent the eyes/eggs from rolling around on the baking tray, stick cocktail sticks through the eyes/eggs at an angle pointing downwards. This also makes them look a bit like sausages lollypops, which is amusing.

Main: Yeti's Angler Fish Special

A house favourite at the Demon Dive Bar. Make sure to fillet that angler fish before it fillets you - else it does some real damage to your kitchen!

Ingredients:

800g angler fish, cut in eight slices (Yeti's favourite, although any fish will do - Scottish kippers are a tasty substitute!)
200g fresh shrimps
200g of whichever hallucinogenic mushrooms* you can get your hands on, small and nicely peeled.
Chantarelle mushrooms would also work, but will not have the same psychedelic side effects.
Handful of finely cut chives
1 onion finely diced
1 tbsp tomato paste
1dl cream
butter, oil, water

Method:

1. Peel the shrimps and save all

the shells. Fry the onion with a few drops of oil, add the tomato purée and the shrimp shells, fill with water and cover. Boil and let simmer for about 10 minutes. Strain and reduce the liquid until approx 1 decilitre is left.

2. Fry the mushrooms in butter. Savour that sweet trippy mushroom steam. When nicely coloured, add the cream and the shrimp mix, boil until the consistence is that of a light stew. Season with salt and pepper. When served, add chives and shrimps.

3. Hunt down an angler fish and catch it - you may need help as them things are slippery! Flavour the angler fish fillets with salt and put it on a table cloth to dry before frying.

4. Fry the fish in a medium hot pan with butter, make sure you get a golden colour on both sides.

Serve with dill boiled potatoes.

*Yeti likes to use her own special forest-grown supply of mushrooms for this recipe. Do not listen to any psychedelic funk music backwards after eating, for at least six hours. Please trip out responsibly.

Dessert: Gin Scotch Pancakes

A classic. Fast and easy to prepare for Fringe-folk with limited time on their hands. Good for breakfast, lunch, dinner, dessert, elevenses, midnight feasts, whatever.

Ingredients:

Flour, Milk, Sugar, Eggs, Gin

Method:

1. Combine flour, milk, sugar and eggs in a bowl.
2. Throw the bowl in the bin.
3. Drink the gin.

*Yeti's: Demon Dive Bar' is at the Pleasance Courtyard until 29 Aug.



Photo by Steve Gregson

All about ThreeWeeks

LONGEST ESTABLISHED: ThreeWeeks is the longest established specialist 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 update, 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. Meanwhile the preview edition, published in late July, is also delivered direct to homes all over central Edinburgh.

TWO DECADES OF EXPERIENCE: The ThreeWeeks editors have been covering the Edinburgh Festival for twenty 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.

THE THREEWEEKS WEEKLY MAGAZINE: The ThreeWeeks Weekly Magazine is our flagship publication, a full-colour tabloid-sized magazine, 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.

THE THREEWEEKS DAILY EMAIL: The TW Daily 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. Sign up for free at threeweeksedinburgh.com/signup

THE THREEWEEKS WEBSITE: In addition to the magazine and

daily email, there is the ThreeWeeks website at threeweeksedinburgh.com. All of our news, reviews, previews, interviews and columns appear there too, plus you can search content by genre, by venue or by year.

THE TW:TALKS PODCAST: ThreeWeeks has been podcasting from the Fringe for over a decade. The all new TW:Talks podcast will see Co-Editor Chris Cooke regularly interview some of our favourite performers, in Edinburgh during the summer, and in London all year round. Tune in at thisweektalks.com.

THISWEEK LONDON: Just like ThreeWeeks Edinburgh discovers and champions great shows, performers and new talent at the Edinburgh Festival, ThisWeek London does the same all year round, with a set of Three To See recommendations every day of the year plus the Caro Meets interviews with some of our favourite performers, producers and directors.

ThisWeek London also benefits from the two decades ThreeWeeks has been covering the Edinburgh Festival, tipping Fringe favourites old and new (and brand new) as they appear in London.

Check all this out online or sign up for the free TW Weekly email at thisweeklondon.com.

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The Marvellous Adventures of Mary Seacole
3-29 Aug 18.10 C nova



Atticist
Life According to Saki
3-29 Aug 14.15 C



Asleik & Jon (Norway)
Aladdin and His Magical Europe Refugee Tour 2016
3-29 Aug 17.30 C nova



Under Two Floorboards
Is it Tabu?
4-29 Aug 19.45 C south



The Oxford Gargoyles
The Oxford Gargoyles: Jazz A Cappella
15-29 Aug 15.30 C



Cobbles & Rhyme Productions
[Title of Songs]
3-29 Aug 18.00 C **soco at ibis**



EM-Lou Productions
5 Guys Chillin'
4-29 Aug 23.00 C **too**



Greene Shoots Theatre
Molière's the Hypochondriac
14-20 Aug 12.00 C



ACJ Productions
Tomorrow Maybe
3-29 Aug 15.15 C nova



Max Emmerson Productions and Elva Corrie
Adam & Eve and Steve
3-29 Aug 17.45 C

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