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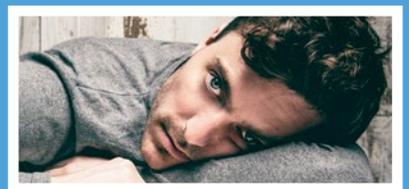
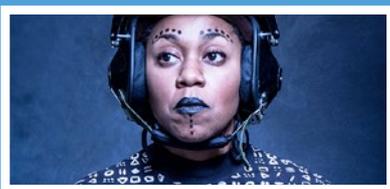
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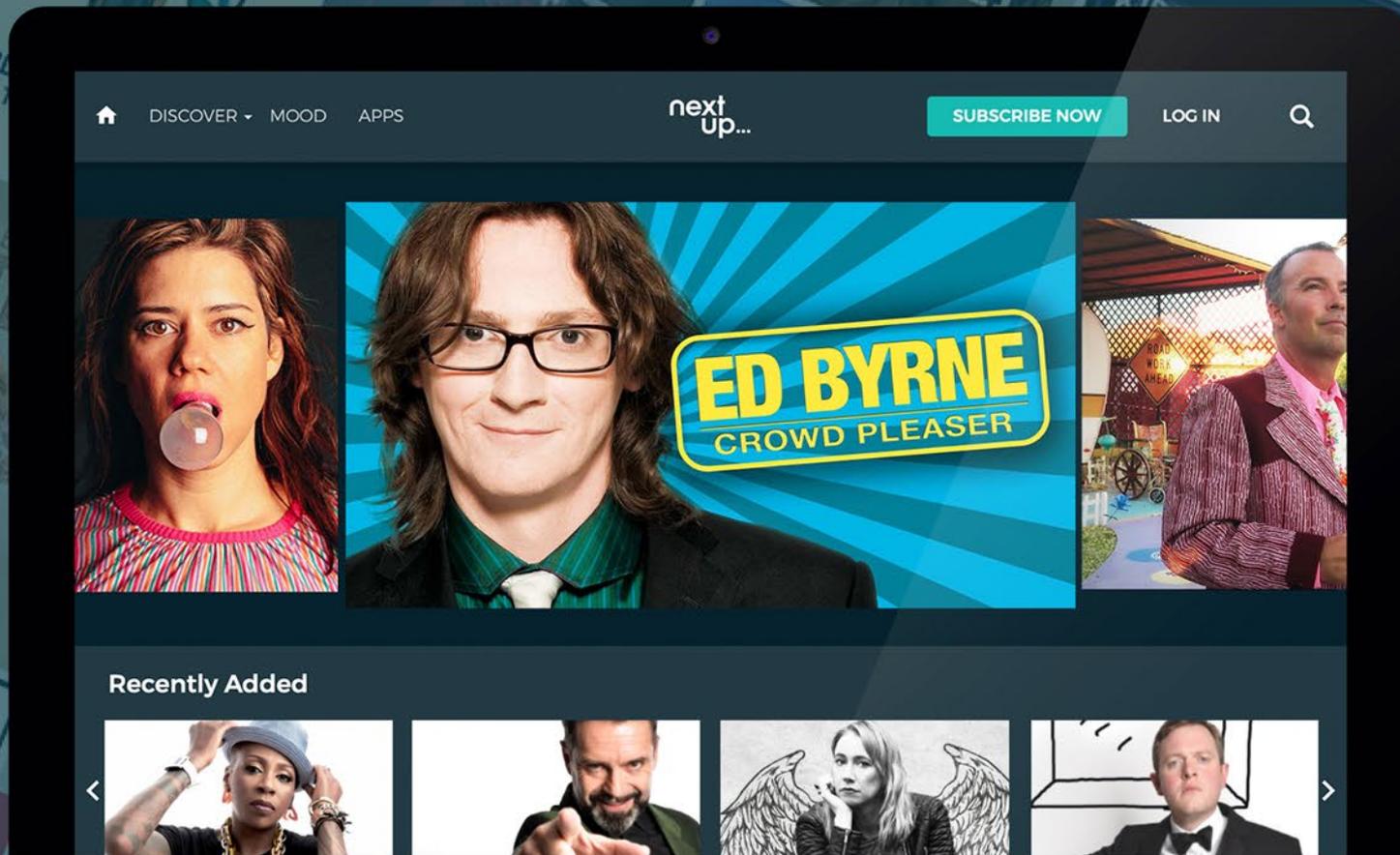
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INTERVIEWS

ThreeWeeks editors Caro Moses and Chris Cooke talk to some of our favourite performers who are appearing at the Edinburgh Fringe this year



CARO MEETS | COMEDY INTERVIEW

Matt Parker: Humble Pi

ThreeWeeks readers may be aware of the high esteem in which we hold the three creative, clever and funny people behind the Festival Of The Spoken Nerd shows. And if so, you can probably imagine the delight with which we responded to the news that one member of that outfit, funny mathematician Matt Parker, is in Edinburgh this summer with a solo show.

'Humble Pi' is a kind of accompaniment (he'll explain further down) to his fab-sounding book of the same name. I spoke to him to find out more about the show and the book, and about what it's like to be flying solo this time.

CM: Right, let's start with the show: what's it all about? Can you give us a bit of a sneak preview as to what to expect from it?

MP: 'Humble Pi' is a show about mathematical mistakes. I've gone with the subtitle 'a comedy of maths errors', because even though that risks sounding like a modern re-imagining of Shakespeare - of which there are 46 shows at the Fringe this year, yes I counted! - it says exactly what I set out to do: write a comedy

show about when maths goes wrong. People can expect McDonalds getting their numbers wrong, a plane running out of fuel mid-flight and other stories on the hilarious-terrifying spectrum.

CM: What made you decide to step out and make your solo debut?

MP: It's because I accidentally wrote a show. I host the monthly night 'An Evening Of Unnecessary Detail' which always involves me trying out new material. Normally we're working up a new Festival Of The Spoken Nerd

show but when we decided to have a fallow cycle I just kept producing new material all the same.

At the time I was writing the book version of 'Humble Pi' and so, in parallel, I was talking about it on-stage, accidentally writing a show simultaneously. When I had other comedians telling me the show was coming along nicely I figured I should stop living in denial and book a spot at the Fringe.

CM: Can you tell us a bit more about the book, and what

motivated you to write it?

MP: My goal in life is to entertain people in a way that is also mathematically interesting. So stories about maths going wrong was perfect material for me. People love a disaster story. And there is so much interesting maths holding up our modern society, but it often only gets noticed when it goes wrong. I had always been interested in maths mistakes but the book is actually directly the fault of the marketing department at Penguin. I had to convince them why they should publish another maths book - instead of a celebrity cookbook, it seems - and I sold them on hilarious tales of people making mistakes. They agreed, I think slightly worried they had made their own miscalculation. But the book hit number one on the Sunday Times best seller list so they're pretty happy now.

CM: How does it feel, performing alone, after doing lots of shows as a trio with Helen Arney and Steve Mould?

MP: Lonely. And not just because I have fewer nerds to hang out with backstage: it's very different being by yourself on stage. There is the obvious fact that I have to do more work. In our group show I would get the occasional breather as Helen sang a song or Steve set something on fire. Now it's only me, for 3,600 seconds, without a break.

On top of that I have to play more roles. In 'Spoken Nerd' I was free to be as hard-core nerdy or mathsy as I wanted, because Helen or Steve would step in on behalf of the audience and rein me back. Ironically, by myself I need to be less relentlessly extreme with the maths because I don't have the other two to bring the average down to something palatable. But don't worry: like all of life's problems I've solved this with technology.

CM: How different is this show in tone and content from the sort of shows you did with them in the past?

MP: It's the same tone as always: as in it is an all-encompassing celebration of nerdiness. There is plenty of numerical fun for the maths fans in the audience and enough comedy and fun stories that all the other normal-humans can get swept up in the excitement. The difficulty this time was the serious nature of some maths mistakes. When maths goes wrong in engineering, medicine or aviation

then everybody dies. And a 'comedy' show about maths can only have so many stories which end in 'and then everybody died'. So it's been a balancing act to get across the serious side of mathematics in a light-hearted show. If it helps: the show features several aviation stories but I've only picked ones where nobody dies. So if you're scared of flying, you have nothing to worry about - other than flying.

CM: What made you want to bring this show to the Fringe?

MP: Because it's a month of the best comedy audiences in the world. I love doing stuff on the maths circuit - last year I gave talks everywhere from the Royal Institution to Harvard University - but there is something invigorating about a pure comedy audience. As much fun as preaching to the maths choir is: the real challenge is entertaining standard issue humans with maths comedy.

CM: Have you found any other mathematical shows on at the Fringe? Or aren't there any?

MP: It's still not a crowded market space, but there are some! My frequent collaborator Timandra Harkness has a new show called 'Take A Risk' featuring statistics, danger and a 0.00003348% chance someone in the audience will do the show instead. Mathematician, World-Slam-Champion and all-round lovely chap Harry Baker is doing a show about turning 10,000 days old. Legitimate maths teacher and musician Kyle D Evans is back for a week of his show 'Maths Madness'. And an Australian comedian called Tom Cashman is doing a show 'XYZ' which claims to be about maths. I don't know Tom, but they're right on my turf so I'll definitely be checking them out!

CM: What's coming up next for you, after Edinburgh?

MP: Straight after the Fringe I'm off to Australia with my wife. I'm doing some work with maths teachers in Sydney, but most of the time will be spent seeing my family in Perth and having some much needed rest. Then October and November I'm on tour with the 'Humble Pi' show around the UK! It'll be a full evening of maths, mistakes and comedy. All the details are on my site standupmaths.com

Matt Parker performs 'Humble Pi' at Pleasance Dome until 26 Aug.

CARO MEETS | COMEDY INTERVIEW

Keisha Thompson: Man On The Moon



Photo by Benji Reid

I first noticed 'Man In The Moon' - created and performed by Keisha Thompson - when it did a one off show in London: I really wanted to see it but wasn't able to make that date. So, of course, when a press release for an Edinburgh run turned up in my inbox, I was naturally quite excited.

Drawing on Thompson's own experiences and her relationship with her reclusive father, it sounds like a fascinating piece of theatre, dealing with both difficult and intriguing themes, and benefiting from a very interesting approach. I spoke to Keisha to find out more.

CM: Can we start by talking about the form of 'Man In The Moon'? What styles of performance can we expect from it?

KT: It is a storytelling piece with moments of poetry and song woven in. It's conversational and intimate and somewhat surreal.

CM: I've seen it described as 'Afrofuturistic' - can you talk a bit about what that means?

KT: The phrase that helps me explain Afrofuturism is - well, some call it 'other', we call it 'otherworldly'. Afrofuturism is a canon of artistic and scientific work that uses the experience of othering that many PoC face and re-imagining it. By using scientific, mathematical, historical references we re-imagine the black experience in a way that feels liberating and true and unbound.

It manifests itself as fashion, music, theatre, coding apps, whatever! Sometimes listing names of artists helps - Octavia Butler, Sun Ra, Janelle Monae, Solange, Samuel R Delaney, Zak Ove. For my show, I use the

knowledge that has been passed down to me from my dad - quantum physics, Black British politics, mathematics, etc - to be imaginative and rewrite our narrative. My dad has always felt like an alien to me in many ways, so I wanted to use that extended metaphor to explore what it means to be 'other'. Where is the value in it? When is it something to be celebrated? When is it something to be feared?

CM: Next, what is the show about and where does its narrative take us? What would you say are the primary themes of the play?

KT: The show is about my relationship with my dad. I take a physical journey from my house to my dad's house. It's usually the other way round but something goes wrong, which flips the routine. I communicate with my dad through letters and books. However, when five months go by without hearing from him I start to worry. The piece takes us on an emotional and surreal journey as well. It's filled with memories and moments that

explore my dad's mental health and his identity as a Black British man. Effectively I try to share how that has impacted me. Also I show how I've had to puzzle together the love and knowledge that we share as father and daughter.

CM: How do the scientific and mathematical elements sit alongside the exploration of mental health and identity? Why bring those themes together?

KT: Those topics are things that my dad is extremely passionate about. When I say he writes me letters, they are not typical letters like 'Dear Keisha...' It's charts and formulae and numerology and astrology diagrams and references to science and maths books. I'm simply using the language that my dad uses with me. When I did more research into mental health I discovered stuff like Enneagrams. So again, it wasn't hard to find numbers and scientific language. They found me.

CM: What was the inspiration for the piece? Where did the

ideas for this come from?

KT: When I got the initial commission from STUN to develop a new piece of work. I literally hadn't heard from my dad in five months, so it was very honest and present. However, on a larger scale I'd been thinking about making a piece of work for years that celebrated fatherhood and masculinity. I felt like every time I read about those topics in the news, gender theory, etc, it was always so negative. Obviously there is a lot of conversation about masculinity and mental health at the moment. I was sorely aware that I needed to investigate my dad's past and how it had led him to be a recluse. This commission was the perfect catalyst for me to confront all those things

CM: Tell us a bit about the music?

KT: I wrote all the songs in the play that I sing. I worked with amazing sound designer Andrew Wong, who sourced all the other music. He is a lord for finding the perfect music to set the right emotional tone or create the right atmosphere. After the first year of working on the piece we did a sharing. Benji Reid, my director, had encouraged me to write songs for the piece. I was quite reluctant at first. I was like - it's not a musical! But after the sharing, the feedback regarding the songs and the loop pedal was strong so I listened. When I got the support from Contact and ACE to develop the work I brought in Ruby-Ann Patterson as a song-writing mentor. She was great to bounce ideas off and push me to be more confident with my song-writing.

CM: After the Edinburgh run, what's in the near future for 'Man In The Moon'?

KT: It's doing some more dates in the autumn. I'm having conversations with a few venues about where it can go next year. I'll see what comes out of the Fringe. Also I launched the EP, 'Moonwhile', this summer which is the songs from the play re-imagined as a short album.

CM: What's coming up next for you after that? Do you have any new projects in the pipeline?

KT: I've got a new piece of work called 'Bell Curves' that has been commissioned by Box Of Tricks. That will be a part of PUSH festival in HOME in January. We'll see what comes out of that. I'm super excited to develop and share a new story. Box Of Tricks have been so supportive. They're really pushing me to try something new. I'm always up for a challenge.

Keisha Thompson performs 'Man On The Moon' at Summerhall from 20-25 Aug.

Eloise Poulton: Bad Aunts

'Bad Aunts' - a co-creation by Eloise Poulton and Elinor Lipman, produced through their company Untoward Productions - sounds like a really interesting mixture of comedy, theatre, chat show and improv, and I am really keen to see it.

It's not just the fact that it sounds like such an interesting mash up that makes it enticing, it's also the fact that the pair have chosen to create a show which is about - and performed by - a trio of women over fifty, which is a demographic that can end up unfairly marginalised when it comes to opportunities in the entertainment business.

To find out more about the show, the cast, and how it all came together, I spoke to company founder Eloise.

CM: Can you start by telling us the premise of your show? What happens in it?

EP: 'Bad Aunts' is an interactive sitcom chat show starring three women over fifty. Maz, Jo and Dee live together and they are all at crossroads in their lives: dealing with a marriage breakdown, bereavement, job hunting and job rejection - but they're all trying to find their voices again.

The show happens in Dee's living room, and the audience are part of the action, participating in sections of the show like Agony Hour, when the Aunts solve their problems! There's a special chat show voice-over by Steve Frost. Plus, every show, a different comedian drops by as the local Postie for five minutes of improv. It's a real celebratory mishmash!

CM: Can you explain how sitcoms and chat shows helped to inspired it, and why you wanted to create a show on this basis?

EP: We were definitely inspired by sitcoms and chat shows we grew up

watching, like 'The Graham Norton Show'. But we wanted to make something with a twist to be a bit more of a comment on the genre, like 'The Mrs Merton Show'. The majority of Saturday night chat show hosts are male, so we thought we'd change this up a bit! There are some brilliant shows starring older women, like 'Grace And Frankie'. We thought colliding genres would excite audiences.

CM: How did you go about putting the show together? How did your creative process work?

EP: The script has gone through the process of being demolished and rebuilt several times as, when new writing comes into a rehearsal room, the actors are active in fleshing out their characters. We have worked very collaboratively and the result is a melting pot of ideas from a full company.

CM: It's obvious that you're keen to combat ageism, but can you explain how you are doing that through this show?

EP: The clearest way we are combating ageism is by being unapologetically visible, bold and human. The show is less about being 'older' and more about life experience. How life can be exciting and novel whatever age you are - as long as you have people with whom you can share it. It is important that we are putting three older female actresses centre

stage, yes; but it's more important that their stories are as much about identity as in a coming-of-age drama.

CM: Do you think it's possible to create real changes in attitudes through this kind of show?

EP: Everything has to start with talking. Laughter, now more than ever, is an important force to bring people together - not in spite of their differences, but because of them. Knowing and appreciating different people is the best way to change attitudes for the better. 'Bad Aunts' celebrates community through comedy.

CM: Do you find that ageism in media like comedy and theatre disproportionately affects women?

EP: We have spoken to a variety of women in the industry through our podcast discussions and this does seem to be the case. It's a brutal industry which is very based on patriarchal ideals. Unfortunately, being young and attractive are often central to success and survival. These ideals don't benefit anyone, but benefit women least of all. Visibility is the best way to change these attitudes.

CM: How long has the show been in development? Where else has it been performed?

EP: The show has been in development since January this year -



CARO MEETS | COMEDY INTERVIEW

not very long, considering it had a sell-out three night show at the Brighton Fringe three and a half months later! We also did a London preview at Camden People's Theatre in July.

CM: What hopes do you have for it in the future?

EP: 'Bad Aunts' responds to its audiences and every show is different because of their input. I hope that we can tour it round the UK and meet different communities, to continue the life of the show.

CM: What made you decide that

this would be a good show to take to the Fringe?

EP: Because it's a lot of fun and has a broad audience appeal!

CM: What has your previous experience of the Fringe been?

EP: We've all been before in various capacities - as actors, writers, directors, stage managers - but this is our first time as a full company.

CM: What are you looking forward to about being in Edinburgh for the Festival?

EP: We are most looking forward to being surrounded by art and by enthusiasm for art being made! We can't wait to meet our audiences and the hundreds of thousands of people passing through Edinburgh. And it will be wonderful to chat to other companies and see their shows.

CM: What's coming up next for you, after the Fringe?

EP: More Madness and Badness. Watch this space!

'Bad Aunts' is on at Gilded Balloon at Old Tolbooth Market until 25 Aug.

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Cheong-euy Park: Spray and MacBeth



CARO MEETS | THEATRE INTERVIEW

It's more than a decade since Korean director Cheong-euy Park first brought his work to the Festival, but the approach of the Choin Theatre company founder still seems entirely fresh. This year he is back at the Fringe with two shows, both adaptations of existing texts, and both sound like very quirky and interesting interpretations.

I spoke to Cheong-euy Park to find out more about his career, about this year's productions, and what we can expect from Choin Theatre in the future.

CM: You're bringing two shows to edfringe this summer, so let's talk about them separately: can you start by telling us what to expect from 'Spray'? What story does it tell?

CP: 'Spray' is a dark comedy about coexisting with noise and our neighbours, and what happens when that noise is silenced. We hope our neighbours' noise is never silenced. In this show, images and symbols serve as a kind of grammar to create changes of time and space on stage. I hope the audience understands and enjoys it.

CM: What themes does the show explore?

CP: A trigonometry of noise, empathy and revenge. Freedom from everyday societal rules. Curiosity, anger and compassion: these are the stages of change of emotion our character experiences in response to the noise of his neighbour.

CM: It's an adaptation from a book, isn't it? Can you tell us a bit about the book, and the author?

CP: Yes, it's adapted from a short story written by Kim Kyung-uk. He was born in Gwangju, Korea, in 1971. His debut story, 'An Outsider', won the Writers' World Prize in 1993, and since then he has published several short story collections in Korean. His

first English publication, 'God Has No Grandchildren', was published in 2015. His writing is unpredictable and enigmatic.

CM: What made you want to tell this story?

CP: Two big events dominated the news in South Korea in 2016. One was the Sewol ferry disaster and the other was the anti-government protests. Whenever I came back from a protest at Gwanghwamun Square, I thought our apartment complex was too quiet. Some people treated the cries of the Sewol ferry disaster's victims' families as noise. Our neighbours' noise has a cause. We are not angry at the noise of our neighbours. We are angry because it confirms our state of existence.

CM: The second show is an adaptation of a play that will be very familiar to most Fringe goers. What made you decide to do a show around this particular Shakespearean tale?

CP: Our 'Macbeth' is a study of the anger of young people who want to be the devil. I wanted to find the reason why people have loved this play for so long, why people love a devil like Macbeth. We all live for our own desires. In a society where we cannot achieve those desires fairly, we are willing to become the devil.

CM: Your 'Macbeth' is a one person show, played alternately by two performers, one male and one female. What made you decide to make it a solo performance, and why the alternating performers?

CP: Why a female performer as well as a male one? I thought the piece would work well with someone who was considered a more vulnerable member of society. Someone with less power, so it's hard to reach a place of higher status... Smaller, smaller beings. When society has become one of infinite competition, their rise is impossible. In the end, they feel pity for the devil's failure. Why solo? It concentrates attention on this one poor soul who cannot fulfil their desires in reality. The audience will be able to contemplate their souls, as this lone figure does on an empty stage. Why alternating performers? No special reason. The female actor is the lead in 'Spray', and it's too much for her to do two shows every day.

CM: How would you describe both shows in terms of genre - what style of show can audiences expect?

CP: Total theatre. I can't explain because I never think about genre. You can decide...

CM: Can you tell us a bit about

your company, Choin Theatre? What made you decide to create your own company, and what were your aims in setting it up?

CP: Every company has their own creative method. They should. So I wanted to find my own creative method and style of creation. In 2006, 2007 and 2008 I brought two shows to Edinburgh, both dramas without speech: 'Train' and 'The Angel And The Woodcutter'. We have been always trying to find our own way to create something new... and we will continue to do so.

CM: What about you..? Did you always want to be a theatre director, and is it what you have always done? How did your career begin, and how has it progressed?

CP: Yes, I've wanted to be a theatre director since I was at university, or even earlier. I majored in English Literature and attended a theatre club during my college days. After graduating, I joined a theatre company right away and worked as an assistant director for about seven years, during which time I was able to direct several performances. I made a show called 'Train' in 2002, which gained a lot of attention in Korea. I decided to create my own company to further investigate my own way of creating theatre.

CM: Do you have any unfulfilled ambitions...? Where do you see yourself headed career-wise?

CP: Using various elements such as video, circus and dance, I want to create a variety of performances that are especially suited to the stage. My job is to create. It is my job to create a better environment for creation. I want to maintain my livelihood through creation, meet good actors, train together and, above all, meet more skilled creators. If I can make a lot of money or become famous it might help me to make such an environment. Ha ha!

CM: As you mentioned, this isn't the first year you've brought shows to edfringe: what made you want to return? What do you like about the Festival?

CP: The Festival has a fantastic reputation and our previous shows here sold out. I want to create good memories for our company members. But if I have to choose one reason, it's curiosity. I wonder what audiences here will think about my work. In terms of what I like about the Festival, it is honest. Very honest... Because so many different people evaluate performances. The result is very honest.

'Spray' is on at Assembly Roxy until 26 Aug. 'MacBeth' is on at C South until 26 Aug.

Colin Granger:

I'm always on the lookout for children's shows doing something truly different. Many productions for younger festival-goers repeat similar stories and themes, even if they do them brilliantly. But as soon as I heard about this play it stood out, because it's about a subject I have literally never seen tackled by a theatre company before. And, as you might imagine, I have seen a lot of companies tackling a lot of themes!

'Ogg 'n' Ugg 'n' Dogg' is about how people domesticated animals - specifically, in this case, dogs - and it looks brilliant. To find out more about the show and the company behind it, I spoke to Colin Granger, writer and director.

CM: I am really intrigued by the subject of this show. Can you tell our readers what it's all about?

CG: 'Ogg 'n' Ugg 'n' Dogg' is set in the fresh, sparkling new world just after the last Ice Age, and tells the tale of two young hunter-gatherers who pal up with a pair of wolves called Tooth 'n' Nail and choose a wolf pup to be their pet - and the world's first dog. The play begins in pristine woodland in a place we now call Yorkshire, and ends in exactly the spot in the present with two dog walkers who bear a remarkable resemblance to Ogg 'n' Ugg.

CM: What themes does the show explore?

CG: The remarkable relationship humans have with the animals they chose to be their companion and friend.

CM: What styles of performance are used in the play?

CG: I always use a rich theatrical mix in my plays: physical comedy, music, mime, song, story-telling, puppetry - whatever it takes to tell a story.

CM: Can you tell us a bit about the central characters? Do they speak a language we would understand?

CG: With their bows, arrows and

Ogg 'n' Ugg 'n' Dogg

spears, Ogg 'n' Ugg rule supreme and that sometimes goes a bit to their heads. Tooth 'n' Nail are more down to earth and are far more savvy. Lucky for us they all speak English: Ogg 'n' Ugg with a Yorkshire accent, and the wolves, gangster rap.

CM: I think it's a really interesting subject to explore, especially for a younger audience. What inspired you to focus on the evolution and domestication of dogs?

CG: Because the story of how humans created an animal companion for themselves is such an inspiring and positive one. I felt a play about this would interest everyone, no matter how young or old you were or what walk of life you come from.

CM: Are you a fan of dogs yourself? Do you have a favourite breed?

CG: Yes, I'm very much a fan but I don't have a favourite breed. My favourite dog is a mongrel as I believe you get more dog for your money and much more character. My first dog as a child was a mix of collie, labrador, and retriever - perfect!

CM: What made you decide to bring the show to Edinburgh? Do you think it's a good fit for

the Fringe?

CG: Because of the opportunity of showing it at the best performing arts showcase in the world. Yes, I think 'Ogg 'n' Ugg 'n' Dogg' is a perfect fit because it's new and original and that's what the Fringe should be all about.

CM: You've done lots of Edinburgh shows before. What are you expecting from this year's festival?

CG: Yes, I've been coming to the Edinburgh Fringe for over thirty years as a promoter, producer, playwright, programmer, venue manager and, at the beginning, even as a performer until I decided I was no actor. I am always optimistic when I come here - we are hoping for great audiences.

CM: Can we talk a bit about the company? How did Theatre Fideri Fidera come into being, and what are its aims?

CG: Theatre Fideri Fidera came out of a decision to concentrate on things we loved doing the most. So, in 2017 my partner Marina Kobler - stage manager and designer - and our daughter Natasha - performer and tour manager - set up a company of travelling players. We've taken our first two plays to all parts of the UK and Ireland and are looking forward



Photo by Paul Mansfield

CARO MEETS | CHILDREN'S SHOW INTERVIEW

to doing the same with Ogg 'n' Ugg 'n' Dogg. Our aim was to establish ourselves as a leading touring theatre company producing new work and I think we have achieved that aim.

CM: Do you have any grand ambitions for the future?

CG: Not really, I'm happy to just carry on doing what I love.

CM: What happens next for this show? Are there plans for further festival visits or tour dates?

CG: We already have been booked for a rural tour in the autumn and a run at Komedia Brighton in December and are looking forward to a national tour in 2020.

CM: And what's coming up next for you after this show? Any new projects in the pipeline?

CG: Yes, a new play is already on the way!

'Ogg 'n' Ugg 'n' Dogg' is on at Gilded Balloon Teviot until 26 Aug.

TRANSPOTTING LIVE

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- Violence & sexual references
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EDINBURGH PLAYHOUSE

Dave Chawner: Mental

CARO MEETS | COMEDY INTERVIEW

The certifiably lovely Dave Chawner (yes, we are fans) heads back to edfringe this year with a show about mental health.

I'm always really admiring of performers who manage to approach serious issues from a comical perspective. And it's a topic Dave has broached before in his stand-up, plus he's written a book about his recovery from anorexia. So we're curious to see what approach he takes in 'Mental'.

No surprises - then - that I arranged a chat with Dave himself to find out more.

CM: Okay, let's start at the beginning: I think the title might be a bit of a clue, obviously, but can you explain what 'Mental' is all about?

DC: Yes, the clue is literally in the title. It's a show about mental health, rather than mental illness. I was a guest on 'The Today Programme' on Radio 4 and the researcher called me and said "I'm really excited to talk to you because I don't have any mental health". That made me laugh. We all have mental health. One in four of us has mental illness, but four in four

of us has mental health. Why do we only talk about illness rather than well-being, why do we always talk about the negative rather than the positive? I want to change that. Good mental health is amazing, it's something everyone deserves. I wanted to use comedy as a fun, engaging and creative way to get that across

CM: What themes do you explore through the show?

DC: Emotional regulation, mental awareness, public health literacy and coping mechanisms... but don't worry

it's not as dull, dry and boring as it sounds, I talk about Ant & Dec for a bit, so it's not all heavy!

CM: So, it's clear you feel that comedy is useful when talking about mental health: can you explain the how and why?

DC: Comedy is the perfect tool to talk about mental health because when people are laughing they have to be listening, and when they're listening they can learn. I want to use that in order to reach people who have experience of mental illness, so that they can realise they are not alone, but also to reach out to people who have never even thought about mental health, and to educate them in a fun and creative way.

CM: Do you think your show itself could help a person who is suffering, or is it more that it's helpful to the conversation around mental health?

DC: I don't want to pretend like I'm The Dalai Lama, going around benevolently prophesying 'The Gospel Of Mental Health According To Dave'. I don't want to be one of those people who wants to 'virtue signal' at every opportunity. What I do want to be is a positive influence on the conversation in general. So, in the show I give coping mechanisms that might be useful, charities that could be worthy of note and some general directions.



I don't know if that answers the question though!

CM: Tell us about your book.

DC: It's all about my experience of anorexia - which is why I originally wanted to call it 'The Real Hunger Games'!... but apparently that "infringes copyright"! It's called 'Weight Expectations' and it's a look at anorexia from the inside out.

It's the book I needed when I was seventeen and I developed anorexia. When people found out I'd got a mental illness they started treating me like a patient, not a person. People didn't have a laugh and a joke with me any more because they knew I was ill. That was more isolating than anything else.

So, it's a jokey, light-hearted, quirky look at eating disorders, all based around a psychological model called



Kate Lucas: Is Selling Herself

CHRIS MEETS | COMEDY INTERVIEW

Musical comedian Kate Lucas isn't just selling her show this Fringe, she is also selling herself, literally, as she dissects the sinister side of advertising and social media with some darkly comic songs and an auction of her body parts.

The follow up to acclaimed debut show 'Whatever Happened To Kate Lucas?' - which she also made into a comedy album - 'Kate Lucas: Is Selling Herself' has a strong message, and a very quirky format for delivering it. I threw a few questions in her direction to find out more.



CC: OK, so tell us about the premise for this year's show!

KL: Well it's a bit about advertising and how intrusive it's become, and a bit about how much I'm told to sell myself and how bad I am at that. And at life in general - I have already concussed myself here at the Fringe!

CC: Where did the idea come from to make a show around these themes?

KL: My first solo show finished with a bit about how oppressive perfectionism can be and I felt like I

had begun rather than concluded a long rant on the subject.

CC: Has the format evolved as you've been performing it?

KL: Yes, it's had to a bit. Audiences are very good at letting you know when they are not entertained. I returned to the drawing board with this one a LOT before I think I finally cracked it.

CC: Given the auction element, presumably every show is a little bit different. What have been the highlights (and highest

bids) so far?

KL: Yes, but I've really enjoyed doing a more interactive show. People being people are funnier than anything I could write. My flyerer, who seemed very stoned, came to the show and chipped in with some very high bids and some blissed out encouragement that tickled me.

CC: Does making a show about the advertising-branding-influencer-filled world we now live in make you think about how you sell your own shows?

The Transtheoretical Model which aims to help people to change/break their habits

CM: I feel as though twenty years ago, anorexia was more talked about than it is now. Would you agree? Or is it just me not hearing about it...?!

DC: Reeeeeeeally?! I feel the opposite. I think that mental health, in general, is being talked about much more now. And I think that's incredible. It's exciting and motivating. And I think people are motivated by positivity not negativity, which is why I love to see people talking about health, rather than illness. But that said, I talk about this stuff all the time - I'm a delight at dinner parties! - so I have a skewed view of this stuff.

CM: We've seen and enjoyed your work at the edfringe before. What keeps you coming back to it?

DC: Ah, bless ya. I love everything about The Fringe - the community of performers, the different, diverse and creative shows, the beautiful city, the terrible weather. Fringe time is like my Christmas - which is why I call it Fringemass - it's the highlight of my year and the main reason why I hate September.

Dave Chawner performs 'Mental' at Laughing Horse @ Cabaret Voltaire until 25 Aug.

KL: Absolutely. I do mention in the show that I hired PR because I do want to make money out of what I do. But with this show, I'm not so much coming at it from a position of virtue signalling, but more just acknowledging how I feel about the world as it is right now. I don't offer solutions so much as observations and feelings.

CC: For the uninitiated, how do you describe your kind of comedy? Who are your personal comedy influences and heroes?

KL: Ha! Erm, inappropriate, dark pop/folk, but generally with an upbeat message. I love Flight Of The Conchords and Victoria Wood.

CC: For the initiated, how does the new show compare the previous one, 'Whatever Happened To Kate Lucas?'

KL: I think the last show was mainly about trying to find a thread to string together my ideas. I did set out to be a bit braver and try to say something with this one.

CC: You turned the last show into an album. Tell us about that?

KL: That's the good thing about musical comedy - it takes a long time to write but I think it has a longer shelf life, because people want to hear songs more than once. So I recorded my show at the Soho Theatre.

'Kate Lucas: Is Selling Herself' is on at Just The Tonic at The Tron until 25 Aug.

CARO MEETS | DANCE INTERVIEW

Isabella Soupert: Steve Reich Project

When I heard about the 'Steve Reich Project' - a music, media and dance piece on at Dance Base this month - I was intrigued to find out more. The show uses the work of composer Steve Reich as a jumping off point for what sounds like a truly fascinating exposition of a number of interesting themes.

The project is a collaboration between Belgian musical outfit MP4 Quartet and renowned also-Belgian choreographer and artist Isabella Soupert. I spoke to Isabella to find out more about what to expect from the show, and what inspired it.

CM: Can you start by telling us what to expect from the show?

IS: This performance for a solo dancer and a string quartet explores the tensions between group dynamics and individual autonomy. 'Steve Reich Project' is a pulsating confrontation of dance, music and video art.

CM: What does the video art element add to the performance?

IS: I work freely with the codes and concepts of contemporary dance to make them interact with other disciplines. In 'Steve Reich Project', the space is filled with large scale projections by video artist Kurt D'Haeseleer. This installation provides an immersive backdrop to the choreography with hypnotic images and soundscapes. This scenographic landscape guides the audience to a stronger dramatic tension.

CM: Can you tell us a bit about Steve Reich, and the music you use in the show?

IS: Steve Reich is an American composer. Reich's style of composition influenced many composers and groups. These compositions, marked by their use of repetitive figures, slow harmonic rhythm and canons, have significantly influenced contemporary music, especially in the US. Reich's

Photo by
Danny Willems



work took on a darker character in the 1980s with the introduction of historical themes as well as themes from his Jewish heritage, notably 'Different Trains'. 'Different Trains' and 'WTC 9/11', bring forth intimate reflections within worldwide historical drama.

CM: Can you tell us a bit about MP4 Quartet and how your collaboration came about?

IS: The MP4 Quartet was created in 2008. At the time, its members - Claire Bourdet, Margaret Hermant, Pierre Heneaux and Merryl Havard - were young graduates of the Conservatoire Royal de Belgique. They gained experience and freedom of expression with the Danel, Pavel Haas, Pražák and Kronos quartets.

The MP4 Quartet is dedicated to the outstanding performance of masterworks from the 20th and 21st centuries, presents fresh work by living composers alongside contemporary classics, with special acknowledgement of Belgian composers. MP4 Quartet's dedication to new music extends across genres and has earned them a reputation among classical, contemporary and dance performances.

For this performance, the MP4 Quartet initiated the musical project. They wanted to develop and propose a specific and unique interpretation of the themes developed by Steve Reich. They asked me to collaborate with them, to create a performance that would connect 'Different Trains' and 'WTC 9/11'. I proposed to work also on a third Steve Reich piece, 'Pendulum Music', to add spoken word to the performance.

CM: Can you tell us a bit about the performers?

IS: Shantala Pépe and Johanna Willig-Rosenstein are two dancers with whom I work regularly. They each have a very different background.

Johanna started dancing at the conservatory of Dijon at the age thirteen, in the section of contemporary dance. She then moved

to Tel Aviv to complete her learning at the Masloul Bikurey Ha'itim school. Shantala came from a high level sports background, then studied dance at the National Dance Conservatory of Avignon. Since then, she has worked as a dancer, performer & choreographer. I chose them for the quality and strength of their movements but also for their strong stage presence. There is a dramatic intensity in Reich's works that must be felt and invested.

They're both dancers who are also very good actresses. At some point in the performance, they

move from dance to spoken word using a suspended microphone. I recreated a vocal score for the dancers from fragments of interviews and testimonials from the soundtracks of the works. I needed to be able to work with performers who could stand alone on stage for 60 minutes against a very seasoned string quartet. Shantala and Johanna will appear alternately during the time we are at Dance Base.

'Steve Reich Project' is on at Dance Base from until 18 Aug.

Tom Machell: Ticker

CHRIS MEETS | THEATRE INTERVIEW

Tom Machell is one-fifth of ThreeWeeks Editors' Award winning comedy group zazU. But this year he can be found in the Fringe's theatre programme where he is performing a great new play he has written called 'Ticker'.

Based on real life experiences, 'Ticker' tells the story of twenty-something Spencer, a Geordie millennial who is deeply in love with the inestimable Gabi. Spencer's life is torn apart by Gabi's untimely - and unexplained - death. What follows, according to our reviewer, is "a truly arresting exploration of grief, mental health and toxic masculinity, balanced by dark humour and punctuated by unexpected twists that keep you guessing".

I wanted to find out more about the background to the show, and also how putting on a one-person play at the Fringe differs to being part of a sketch comedy group. So, I posed a bunch of questions to Tom himself.

CC: Tell us about the premise of 'Ticker'

TM: 'Ticker' is a dark comic story about love, loss and grief. It's about Spencer, a typical Geordie lad who likes going out, drinking and having

fun with his pals. But Spencer's life is torn apart by the untimely - and unexplained - death of a girl called Gabi. He suddenly becomes the prime suspect and chief mourner, and things then start to spiral out of control. The



Photo by Matt Crockett

play explores the theme of how not talking about things can eventually lead to self-destruction, as well as raising awareness of the unjust heart conditions that so many young people die from every week in the UK.

CC: It's inspired by your real-life experiences. What made you decide to write a play based, to an extent, on real life?

TM: I lost a very close friend of mine to an undiagnosed heart condition in 2013. She was brilliant, a complete legend, so full of life and such a clever, beautiful, exceptional person. She was only 23 and I didn't think that was fair. I have always wanted to do something to honour her, but she would have found it so cringey if I had written a play directly about her. So I decided to write a play around her condition. I want to raise awareness of these conditions and get more young people to get their heart checked.

CC: How much of those real-life experiences are actually in the play?

TM: The anger I felt towards her death has definitely filtered into the play. Spencer, as a character, is a very angry young man. His choice of language is very true to how I felt about her death. He repeats 'it's not fair' a lot and I would have to agree with him on that. But, with every other element, I tried to move away from my own experience, as I think I would have found focusing on that too difficult. Doing the show every day with all these fictional characters is hard enough. If I had to relive my actual experience I think that would be too hard and quite unhelpful.

CC: Did you research more widely the way young men tend to deal with grief?

TM: I did a lot of research into grief, yes, especially focusing on young

northern men and their response to it. I found that physical responses were much more common than emotional responses. We prefer to punch a wall and keep quiet rather than talk about how sad we are feeling.

CC: Does the piece touch on the wider debate around toxic masculinity and how men often deal with depression and other mental health challenges?

TM: Definitely! I hope that 'Ticker' shows how not talking about things can eventually lead to self destruction, and that the message at the end of the play is clear. I explore masculinity through three characters in the show.

There is Scott, Spencer's best friend and right hand man. He's rude, funny and, in his own words, 'a massive lad'. Then on the other side of the spectrum I have Gabi's best friend Michael. Spencer can't understand him as he doesn't behave like a traditional bloke. He is probably the most aware character in the whole play and Spencer hates that.

Spencer's mental state is all over the place. One moment he is calm and collected, the next he is screaming at a waitress about an order of milk for his tea. A way that I have dealt with these themes in the play is using humour and comedy. I find it's so much easier to open up a conversation about things if we have comedy on our side.

I have found it interesting that my audiences so far have laughed and then checked themselves to make sure that is OK. YES IT'S OK! We need to laugh, we need to see that it is ridiculous that we don't talk about things, and to recognise the ridiculous labels and rules that we place upon ourselves, and that it is OK to be sad.

CC: We know you best as one-fifth of zazU. What made you decide it was time to try your hand at writing a play?

TM: Well, I was heavily inspired by my zazUvain co-star Maddie Rice, who came up to Edinburgh last year with 'Pickle Jar'. I had it on my bucket list that I wanted to write a play, bring it up to Edinburgh and hopefully get it published. It has been the most terrifying thing I have ever done creatively and mentally, but I love the play, the characters and the story, so even though it is a whirlwind of emotions, it's fun...I think.

CC: How does performing a one-person show compare to being part of a group?

TM: It's bizarre! There are some positives, especially if you are a control freak. However, you have to be so mentally strong. If something goes wrong with zazU, all five of us can band together and get ourselves out of a rut. Being on your own, you have to do that by yourself, which is much more difficult.

CC: How did you team up with the show's director Derek Anderson? What was his role in developing the piece?

TM: I met Derek doing an 'R&D' at the Bunker Theatre in London three years ago and we have been pals ever since. I sent him a fifteen minute extract of the show. We then had a coffee and he kindly agreed to work with me on it. He has literally done everything on bringing the show to life - he directed it, built and designed the set, developed the script and is the lighting designer. He is a Fringe hero and I owe him my life.

CC: We mentioned zazU. What's going on with all things zazU?

TM: ZazU are good! We are having a break from live stuff as everyone is so busy, but we'll be back soon with something new.

Tom Machell performs 'Ticker' at Underbelly until 25 Aug.

THREEWEEKS REVIEWS

ThreeWeeks publishes a new helping of reviews every day of the Festival in the TW Daily email bulletin. Here in the Review Edition you can read about some of the shows recommended by our review team so far - every one has a 4/5 or 5/5 rating. Check all our reviews online and sign up to the TW Daily for the latest batch every day.

CHILDREN'S SHOWS

Valentina's Galaxy (Frozen Charlotte Productions)

In 1963, Valentina Tereshkova became the first woman to go into space. In 1992, Mae Jamieson became the first black woman to do the same. The inspiration of these two trailblazers is channelled beautifully for a young audience (2-6) by this lovely production. Set design, costume and music all complement and add layers to a charming and very nicely performed story, in which our little girl hero leaves earthly concerns behind her to go on a fantastical space voyage with her imaginary friend. If that wasn't enough, after the gently brilliant immersive conclusion, there's also the chance to handle an actual meteorite as old as the solar system (I'm calling that an acceptable spoiler). Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, until 18 Aug. tw rating 5/5 | [Bruce Blacklaw]

Beetlemania: Kafka For Kids (The Kafkateers)

As we are reminded by our 'serious' opening, Kafka's stories are almost all about unhappy men, often with health problems. Not exactly fertile ground for a round of smart, knockabout child-friendly comedy, you might suppose. You'd be wrong. Things take a meta-Kafka turn early on with the - as it turns out - recurring intervention of officialdom. The show is co-opted by two rather more obviously child-friendly performers, who undertake to do a series of Kafka shorts, building up to the grand finale of 'Metamorphosis'. Or will they? Gags, props and references scattergun across the age range in the room - mostly landing somewhere or other. The closing number rhymes "mess" with "Kafkaesque" and, frankly, if that's not got you on board, I can't help you. Underbelly Cowgate, until 25 Aug. tw rating 4/5 | [Bruce Blacklaw]

Splash Test Dummies (Underbelly and Dummies Corp)

My trusty small co-reviewer and I saw this Antipodean soggy clown show last year and agreed to split our differences at a fair-to-middling three stars. However, on viewing the 2019 programme, it was the first thing she picked out to go and see. To settle the beef, we enlisted the help of the Big Boy Cousins from Glasgow, who

know quality knockabout when they see it. Having settled things in the fashionable form of a popular vote, I am obliged to relate that, whilst it remains true to say that you will see more accomplished physical theatre this Fringe, the will of the (small) people is that 'Splash Test Dummies' is winningly anarchic, tremendously silly and ridiculously good fun.

Underbelly's Circus Hub on the Meadows, until 24 Aug. tw rating 4/5 | [Bruce Blacklaw]

One Duck Down (FacePlant Theatre)

Based on the true story of 7000 rubber ducks being cast adrift, 'One Duck Down' is an endearing tale of one man's attempt to collect the ducks. It's an avenue for tackling important issues such as ocean waste and climate change in an accessible way. Each scene welcomes an interesting new element, whether that's the hand puppet crabs, a giant whale, or a bearded woman, and these constant changes ensure the show remains engaging. There's no doubt this is a heart-warming production, loosely comparable to 'Paddington Bear' with the lovely story and feelings it evokes. 'One Duck Down' is a wholesome, professional piece of children's theatre and, with a few puns thrown in, there's something for the whole family.

Pleasance Courtyard, until 26 Aug. tw rating 5/5 | [Natalie Holman]

The Listies: Ickypedia (The Listies)

Despite the ever-expanding Oxford English Dictionary, there remain many things for which there are, literally, no words. The loose premise of 'Ickypedia' is to present a compendium of new words to cover such scenarios, though our hosts' attentions mostly fixate on the scatological in this rowdy children's comedy show. By the time we're done, we've had audience interaction, puns, water pistols, sketches, banter, bad dancing and the Snot Ness Monster. They carry it all off with great aplomb, sustaining a frenetic pace for a relentless hour that makes the children laugh and join in a lot, and the grown-ups snigger rather more than is proper, considering. Luckily, I don't need to come up with a word for it. I can just say...

Pleasance Courtyard, until 18 Aug. tw rating 4/5 | [Bruce Blacklaw]

First Piano On The Moon (Will Pickvance)

Will Pickvance can't really play piano, he says. Just tricks. Admittedly those 'tricks' involve playing 'The Entertainer' upside-down and similar, but still - we'll take his word for it. So imagine the awks when he is picked to play at Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's birthday concert in Salzburg. He goes, of course, and once there in Mozart's Geburtshaus, he realises he'd better learn a tune or two. Mozart himself manifests to the young maestro and, to avoid security, they pop to the moon to work things out because of course they do. Musically, this is tremendous - Mozart, Chopin and Scott Joplin fused and merrily goofed around with. It's a grand shaggy-piano story too, nicely told. Oh, and there's cake.

Summerhall, until 18 Aug. tw rating 4/5 | [Bruce Blacklaw]

COMEDY

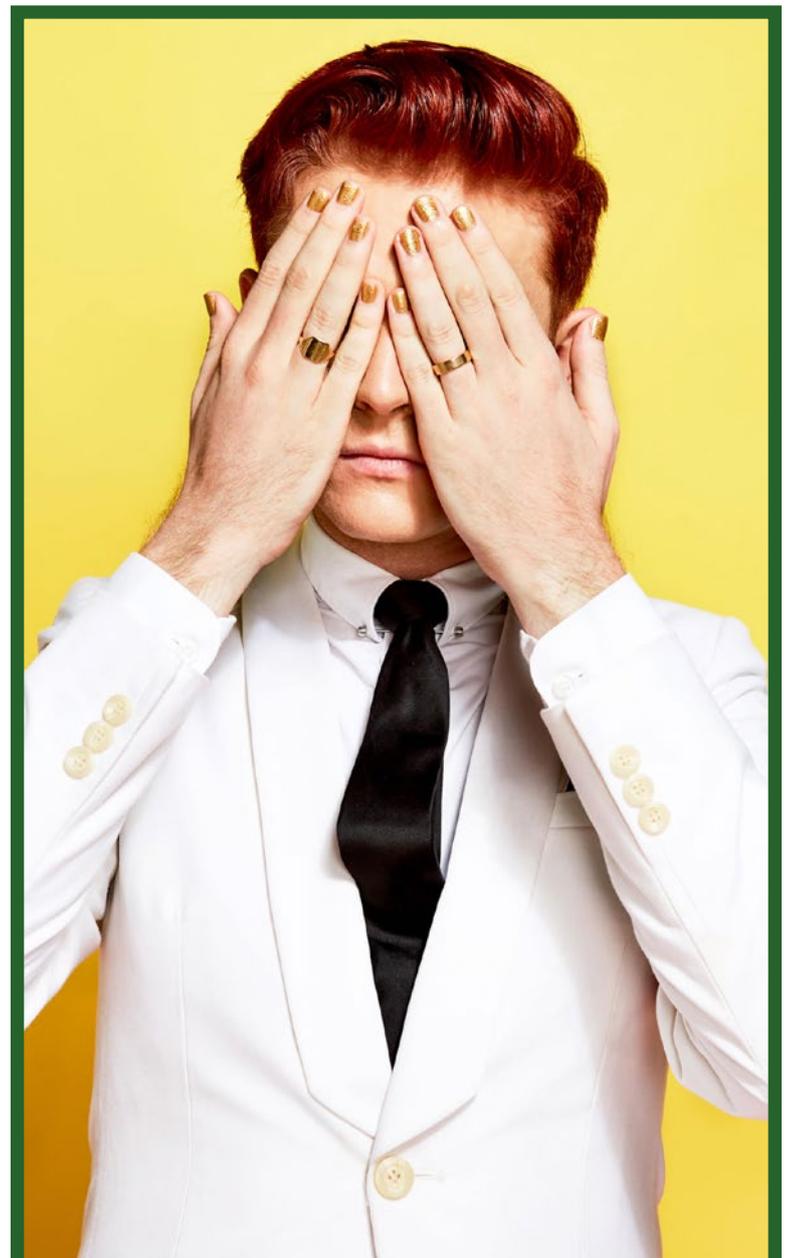
Adam Rowe: Pinnacle (CKP and Intertalent)

"This show is my opinion and I suppose you should all just appreciate it," says Adam Rowe, who finds it mandatory to justify his rather contentious comments. At 27, Rowe has hit the peak of his life, but his mind is occupied as he wanders onto topics such as obesity and celebrities in hot water. His potent focus on the public's morality begs the question: do we still admire our heroes amid mass controversy, or are we going to be hypocritical and make exceptions? His broad show contains razor-sharp delivery, but sets aside any arrogance with a good dose of Liverpoolian self-deprecation. And, without being platitudinous, it is almost safe to say the title represents his current form.

Just The Tonic at The Caves, until 25 Aug. tw rating 4/5 | [Kieran Scott]

Chris Parker: Camp Binch (Berk's Nest)

After a frenetic opening, Chris Parker settles into this powerfully emotional story about his coming of age in rugby-obsessed New Zealand - from being the rugby school's ambassador through to a return trip to his high school. It's a harrowing tale of societal pressure, and of finding your own space and identity, which transcends the setting of small city New Zealand. Parker is particularly adept at skewering his teachers'



Rhys Nicholson - Nice People Nice Things Nice Situations (Underbelly in association with Casarotto Ramsey Management)

With his flash of red hair and sharp suit, Rhys Nicholson is certainly a distinctive character, while his caustic wit and talent for storytelling leave you hanging on his every word. I honestly think I could listen to him read out a shopping list and would find it entertaining. The material in this hour is highly personal: from facing homophobia (the show's title references some scathing feedback he received), to worrying about ageing (he's at the scary age of 29), to adopting a dog that seems to hate him, Nicholson's witty delivery as he pokes fun at himself - and of course others - is endlessly entertaining. He's unapologetic about who he is and, with the confidence he displays, it's hard not to be enchanted.

Underbelly Bristo Square, until 25 Aug. tw rating 5/5 | [Daisy Malt]

inability to vocalise his sexuality, perfectly demonstrating how he really did have to find his own place. Told with style and good humour, Parker's compelling tale of personal growth draws you in, with a surprisingly satisfying resolution making it feel universal and relevant.

Assembly George Square Studios, until 25 Aug. tw rating 4/5 | [Chris Lambert]

Obsolete (Tepid Productions)

Only very brave performers would include five minutes of complete silence in the middle of their show, but this skilful duo pull it off in 'Obsolete', a sardonic and absurd take on technology. In a venue reminiscent of a nuclear bunker, the show has a disturbingly post-apocalyptic feel.

It's presented as a launch for a new technological breakthrough but in truth explores the disquieting degree to which the internet has penetrated into all aspects of our lives. Only in the last third (and during a laboured part on Gates and Bellos) does the pace slacken and the focus drift a fraction. But Dan Allum-Grazelle in particular shines as the straight man of the duo, while the gentle audience interactions are delightful.

Underbelly Cowgate, until 25 Aug. tw rating 4/5 | [Charlie Ellis]

Alice Snedden: Absolute Monster (Berk's Nest / Avalon)

A televised outburst in her native New Zealand provides the backdrop to Alice Snedden's stand up show

examining moral certainties. After a slightly flat start she teased and probed her audience with beguiling hypothetical situations and delightful asides. The show reached its peak in her dissection of the anatomy of a recent affair, bringing her narrative skills to the fore as she mused on the ways the affair has eroded some of the rock solid certainties of her upbringing. Her dramatisation of a conversation with her analyst was beautifully done, though towards the end of the show her delivery became a little rushed. Snedden has successfully woven her experiences into a wise and engaging show.

Pleasance Courtyard, until 25 Aug. tw rating 4/5 | [Charlie Ellis]

Jo Bor: The Story of Walter and Herbert (Joe Bor)

This deeply moving piece of storytelling recounts the friendship between Joe Bor's grandfather (the town planner Walter Bor) and the actor Herbert Lom. Bor was prompted to tell the story as an apology for ignoring his grandfather in his youth, and to commemorate the Holocaust victims whose stories will never be told. He skilfully interweaves sound recordings, video and extracts from his grandfather's unpublished memoirs. The use of a vintage typewriter is a nice touch, while the videos of Bor's father's tongue-in-cheek put downs of his son's efforts are a real delight. As an antidote to the overactive cacophony of much of the Fringe, Bor offers a gentle, humorous meditation on friendship, family and the Jewish experience in the 20th century.

Underbelly George Square, until 25 Aug. tw rating 4/5 | [Charlie Ellis]

Izzy Mant: Polite Club (Get Comedy Ltd)

They say it's always the quiet ones, and that would certainly be true for Izzy Mant. Her show tackles her very British 'politeness', and she has the audience in the palm of her hands throughout - with a teapot and cup, Mant has even dressed the stage fittingly to create a warm, welcoming atmosphere. Each section of the show is cleverly broken up by short videos of other people sharing times that being polite has either got them in trouble or ended up in hilarity somehow. Mant conquers her politeness addiction in this enjoyable combination of comedy and storytelling, with a surprise ending I certainly didn't see coming.

Underbelly Bristo Square, until 26 Aug. tw rating 4/5 | [Natalie Holman]

Ross Smith: Crying/Shame (Ross Smith)

Ross Smith begins by admitting that he has no material, and it takes him a while to warm up. The concept behind the show is theoretically genius, yet the struggle to captivate the audience from the off creates uncertainty. But the Northamptonshire native eventually reveals his scrupulous wit, slowly organising his anecdotes about close family and growing older and producing some award-worthy one-liners. His reluctance to do a Fringe show this year is demonstrated in his moments of hesitation, but his exemplary comedic prowess gives instant gratification. Existential crisis at home or existential crisis on stage? By 25th August, Smith will be telling his agent that it would have been ridiculous to have missed the Fringe.

Just The Tonic at The Tron, until 25 Aug. tw rating 4/5 | [Kieran Scott]

Róisín And Chiara: Get Nupty (Róisín And Chiara)

Róisín O'Mahony and Chiara Goldsmith ask one of the oldest, simplest and most complicated questions in history - what is love?

Their infectiously enthusiastic, absurdist show puts a decent amount of effort into answering this and a lot of effort into not really bothering, and in both cases is a lot of fun. While packed with surreal sketches and ridiculous characters, the show still allows plenty of space for the duo to riff off each other - something that they do extremely well. Wedding veils are worn, audience members pulled up for dates and different approaches to love are explored, the delightful digressions keeping the show flowing even as it haphazardly travels in all different directions.

Heroes @ The Hive, until 25 Aug. tw rating 4/5 | [Jon Stapley]

Jessica Fostekew: Hench (Jessica Fostekew)

Described by a stranger in a gym as "hench", Jessica Fostekew is questioning what body image is, what it means, and how it can entirely shape your outlook on life. In what I can best describe as an aggressively funny style, Fostekew adeptly takes on the hypocrisies of society's norms through the lens of relationships, parenting and a new-found love of weightlifting. For women, how you look and behave is entirely bound up with your womanliness, and of course to Fostekew, being hench has always been less than a compliment - but she's learning otherwise. In this hilarious hour, she turns femininity on its head to show that being strong is an inherently female characteristic; and now she's pretty proud to be hench.

Monkey Barrel, until 25 Aug. tw rating 4/5 | [Daisy Malt]

Andy Field's Funeral (Andy Field)

Andy Field apparently thrives on one-star reviews, though it has only happened once at the Fringe. It won't be happening this time, sorry Andy. In 'Funeral', it's certainly not the end of days for Field. His intrepid storytelling, mainly deriving from his experiences with weed and hallucinogenics, is eccentric and quirky, while the anecdotes about his wild acid trips are well worth an hour of your time. His style is experimental, with an incoherent and erratic running order that differs daily. He is an unconventional and seemingly sloppy comedian, which is the most appealing aspect of his delivery. Though the characters he has devised are hit and miss, the hilarious ones really hit the chortle button.

Just The Tonic at The Caves, until 25 Aug. tw rating 4/5 | [Kieran Scott]

Darren Harriott: Good Heart Yute (CKP / Intertalent)

Darren Harriott began confidently and engagingly, playfully contrasting his working class upbringing with the "middle class arts festival" he was performing at. His performance was fluid and only very rarely did the energy level drop. Harriott's treatment of recent political and cultural controversies was consistently incisive and funny, and his sharpest

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Just These Please: Suitable (Just These Please)

An opening rap performed whilst incongruously wearing suits sets the scene for a sketch show that is playful and fresh. This talented foursome pack 25 thoroughly entertaining sketches into 55 minutes, never letting the pace or quality lapse. The performances and the choreography are polished without being overly slick, with the transitions being particularly effective. The jokes and wordplay were consistently sharp, while the more dramatic sketches were not overplayed. There were countless highlights, including a dispute between the constituent parts of bread and a re-imagining of the final scene of 'Titanic'. The closing song on the plight of the Lothian Buses drivers during the Fringe turned into a communal sing-along, bringing this first-rate show to a satisfying conclusion.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, until 26 Aug.
tw rating 5/5 | [Charlie Ellis]

lines were often delivered as throwaways which kept the audience members on their toes. As the show developed, Harriott confided that the exuberant personality he embodies on stage is not a true reflection of a life characterised by a long line of rejections and the insecurities these have brought. This accomplished performance suggests that the line of rejections (professionally at least) must be coming to an end.

Pleasance Courtyard, until 25 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Charlie Ellis]

Connie Wookey: Denied (Constance Wookey)

Connie Wookey's unfortunate (real life) circumstances take the audience on a journey with musical parody, storytelling and comedy throughout. From losing her US visa to nearly dying in a plane crash, there is never a dull moment in the show. However, she does not shy away from more painful moments, including her friend's sexual assault. Wookey chats to the audience with ease and confidence, while the musical parodies are inventive and certainly add to the overall production. With recognisable songs from an array of genres, the lyrics are witty and pithy, moving the show along at a good pace. Finishing with the audience making foam aeroplanes and throwing them across the room, 'Denied' is a feel-good show, excellently performed and engaging the audience throughout.

Underbelly Bristo Square, until 26 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Natalie Holman]

Demi Lardner: Ditch Witch 800 (Century)

I think it's fair to say that you should expect the unexpected with Demi Lardner. She takes her sketch comedy clowning to the extreme and it's not for the faint-hearted. Making her entrance by appearing from the womb sets the tone for this hour of daft one-liners, absurd skits and displays of her

artwork (which is of course as weird as it should be). Fans of Aunty Donna will love her grotesque caricatures and the fast-paced onslaught of comedy. It's all very DIY and chaotic and the lack (or total rejection) of polish is what makes it so much fun. Some jokes won't always land but it's the daftness that makes it work; and when she hits the sweet spot we're all rolling in our seats.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, until 26 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Daisy Malt]

Double Denim: Adventure Show (Hey Boss)

Once cruise attendants Michelle and Laura have ushered us onto the imaginary ship upon which the plot is somewhat loosely anchored, they whip off their nautical gear to reveal the eponymous denim. A giddily high-paced, gag-packed hour ensues. Reference points include Atomic Kitten, 'Lost', Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson - who should totally stop by and do the audience participation bit one night - and, er, crabs. All delivered through a mix of songs, physical comedy, clowning, daft props, sharp one-liners and, despite the silliness, compelling character comedy. For all the apparent anarchy, they are a tremendously slick double act, scarcely missing a beat (despite several attempts to make one another corpse). Do climb aboard the good ship Double Denim.

Underbelly Cowgate, until 25 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Bruce Blacklaw]

Rob Auton: The Time Show (Show And Tell in association with Avalon Management)

Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock. That's another four seconds of your life gone. It's amazing how we assign so much meaning to the passing of time, in so many different ways, but who even decided what it is? Rob Auton is trying to make sense of it, as only he can. Deconstructing the concept of time is deeply philosophical but, as he

always does, Auton finds the funniest side of the things we take for granted. His ability to make you rethink what you know, delivered in his unique style - a cross between deadpan and awe at human behaviour - hits the mark every time. From eye-wateringly funny one-liners, to meandering musings on what it means to live in the moment, 'The Time Show' is beautifully uplifting.

Assembly George Square Studios, until 26 Aug.
tw rating 5/5 | [Daisy Malt]

Ahir Shah: Dots (Ahir Shah)

Ahir Shah's Fringe run has already sold out in advance, and it's with good reason; Shah's entertaining and erudite assessments of life have earned him much acclaim. In 'Dots' he's taking a look at the bigger picture, trying to make sense of who he is and what he believes in. Being an adult has turned out to be much rougher than his younger self envisaged, and the world seems to be run by idiots that he can exert no influence over. From struggling

to find the mental bandwidth to deal with all the crap in the news, to wondering when it will all get better, it's all very easy to relate to. Shah's inherent humour shines throughout, though there's a slight undertone of melancholy that leaves you feeling both tickled and thoughtful.

Monkey Barrel, until 25 Aug.
tw rating 5/5 | [Daisy Malt]

Catherine Bohart: Lemon (Chambers Touring)

Mind what you do with your face if you're at the front of Catherine Bohart's show - you might end up inspiring next year's material. A sour-faced, yellow-jumpered audience member last year described Bohart as "disgusting" for discussing her sex life a little, so this year she's going to discuss it a lot. The result is deeply personal comedy, tackling long-term relationships and navigating straight spaces as a queer person, in a way that somehow always circles back to the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Bohart's playful style makes for an hour that whips by, more structured than her meandering delivery at first makes it appear. It's brave, too, taking a chance on an ending a lesser performer might not have pulled off.

Pleasance Courtyard, until 25 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Jon Stapley]

Crystal Rasmussen Presents The Bible 2 (Plus A Cure For Shame, Violence, Betrayal And Athlete's Foot) Live! (United Agents)

Crystal Rasmussen is Tom Rasmussen's drag alter-ego. Or is it that Tom is Crystal's alter-ego? The line seems pretty hazy. Based on their book, 'Diary of a Drag Queen', the show explores how drag helped a queer kid from Lancaster to become someone else, while battling with being different and the feelings of shame which came with that. Drag cabaret with a twist, it offers moments that punch you in the gut and others so uplifting this reviewer got goosebumps, particularly when

Rasmussen sings; their voice is astonishing. Through song and spoken word, this is important storytelling that gives insight into the ways drag can serve to heal a troubled soul, and how love ultimately conquers all.

Underbelly Cowgate, until 25 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Daisy Malt]

Nick Ellery: Big Nick Energy (Nick Ellery / Free Festival)

Nick Ellery has lived his life admiring the Rolling Stones and attempting to use spirituality to become a more tranquil individual. For a man who delivers such a composed performance, you can sense the inner rage that still hasn't depleted in Ellery. The Aussie comedian has spent years reeling after the Stones' 1989 release 'Steel Wheels', and considers whether you can ever really forgive your favourite band for their poorest effort. He puts on a cracking display in 'Big Nick Energy', questioning whether he still has the vigour that the title suggests. Comedically, he certainly does, as proved by this competent and unique display, advising us on how to impede a possible midlife crisis through observational humour.

Laughing Horse at The Counting House, until 25 Aug. tw rating 4/5 | [Kieran Scott]

DANCE & PHYSICAL THEATRE

YUCK Circus (Underbelly/YUCK Circus)

Armed with serious acrobatic chops and a playlist absolutely stuffed with bangers, YUCK Circus have arrived from Australia to show Edinburgh a bloody good time. Underbelly's Circus Hub continues an outstanding programme with this truly talented septet, who are as comfortable cracking jokes as they are standing



Backbone (Underbelly and Gravity & Other Myths)

One by one the performers lie down on the stage as the audience files in, and I begin to lose track of how many there are. Then suddenly, everything bursts into life for just over an hour of virtually non-stop action. Eventually, I get it right - there are ten people dashing and leaping around the stage as they prepare the space, creating a scene that almost feels like another world. Backed by live music, this is fast-paced circus that lives up to the troupe's name; for them, gravity is a feeble opponent. With remarkable lifts and moves, it's relentless fun, and you can clearly see that they're enjoying every moment. They push the boundaries, showing just what you can achieve with a bit of teamwork and, of course, absolutely incredible acrobatic skills.

Underbelly Bristo Square, until 26 Aug.
tw rating 5/5 | [Daisy Malt]

on the tops of each other's heads. Even among all the acrobatics there's plenty to relate to; if you've ever been trapped talking to a man so awful you'd rather drive a nail up your nose than listen to another word - well, it's circus, you see where I'm going with this. The obligatory aerial section is the hands-down standout, though with excellent choreography and a great sense of humour, the hour never lags.

Underbelly's Circus Hub on the Meadows, until 24 Aug. tw rating 4/5 | [Jon Stapley]

DNA (Casus Circus and Cluster Arts)

It's always a treat to see Casus Circus, and this year's show is no less mesmerising than its predecessors.

Performed by a seven-strong team, 'DNA' focuses on the differences that bind us all together. Through graceful acrobatics and dance they explore their personalities and tell beautiful stories with their bodies. Their moves are lively and graceful, often belying the sheer physical strength required to achieve them, and are backed by a great soundtrack that always captures the right feel for each act. Featuring gravity-defying chairs, trapeze and aerial work, the show is full of a playfulness that brought smiles to the crowd's faces, matching the performers who clearly relish every moment of what they're doing.

Assembly George Square Gardens, until 25 Aug. tw rating 4/5 | [Daisy Mait]

MUSIC

Fingers And Thumbs with Andy Gunn (Andy Gunn)

This was an eccentric, intimate Saturday night blues session with a friendly, laid-back trio keen to engage with and entertain their audience. The variety of guitars delighted me, particularly the twelve string Portuguese guitar and national steel guitar - and Gunn can certainly play them! Despite the unexpected variety of the programme Gunn was at his best when playing and singing the classics; Sam and Dave's 'When Something is Wrong with my Baby' just bled emotion, while Fats Domino's 'Walking

to New Orleans' had a real connection with the audience. Harmonica and piano supported well, and we were spirited away to New Orleans with Edinburgh Castle as a backdrop.

artSpace@StMarks, 10, 17 Aug. tw rating 4/5 | [Louise Rodgers]

Cello On Fire (Peter Hudler)

Viennese virtuoso Peter Hudler could have been described as a stunt cellist, when he positioned his cello sideways across his lap and played it like a guitar - a marvellous piece of theatre but be careful of that spike! Hudler adapted his technique with each new piece, particularly when he played the hectic bluegrass piece 'Black Run' with a fiddle sound - an enjoyable highlight in this programme of surprising cello discoveries. Debussy's contemplative 'Syrinx' was from the more familiar classical concert repertoire; it's usually a flute solo but he adapted again to give a woodwind nuance to his playing. This wasn't for cello purists but it was exuberant and well suited to the adventurous spirit of the Fringe.

theSpace Triplex, until 24 Aug. tw rating 4/5 | [Louise Rodgers]

The Polis (A Police Tribute) (The Polis)

A four piece trio? The mighty Sting was played by two people here - a bass player and a vocalist. This was a cabaret-type venue, with table service going on throughout, rather than a concert. The Polis were a good live band who gave accurate and skilled performances, rousing the crowd to relive their own teenage years with great enthusiasm! Musically they were excellent; Andy Summers' guitar parts were note for note and the drummer drove the night along with a vigorous Stewart Copeland impression. The singer was also very convincing, effortlessly hitting all the high notes and involving the crowd. By the time they ended with 'Roxanne' the audience were frenzied, but this time Dad wasn't coming to pick them up!

The A Club at the Merchants Hall, 21 Aug. tw rating 4/5 | [Louise Rodgers]

impressive vocals and excellent band make for a polished and hilarious production.

Underbelly Cowgate, until 25 Aug. tw rating 4/5 | [Natalie Holman]

Scream Phone (Swipe Right Theatre)

Based on the retro game Dream Phone, 'Scream Phone' introduces three girls at a sleepover, about to experience a night they'll never forget. Receiving several spooky calls on an oversized pink phone about a mysterious admirer, the characters explore who they think might "fancy" them and why. Boasting parodies of classic 80s hits such as 'Material Girl', the musical amply showcases the cast's impressive vocals: the harmonies, solos and choral work are all flawless and add a lot to the overall polish and professionalism of this well-written production. Like an 80s mash-up of 'Mean Girls', 'Clueless' and 'Scream', this spoof horror musical will have you in fits of laughter, on the edge of your seat and in admiration throughout.

Gilded Balloon Patter Hoose, until 26 Aug. tw rating 5/5 | [Natalie Holman]

You And I: A New Musical (Colla Voce Theatre)

Think 'Black Mirror' meets 'LaLa Land' and you've got 'You And I: A New Musical'. The show follows the tale of one woman's adventures with a very intelligent robot that turns up at her door one day. The soft, lullaby vocals of the cast took the audience on a gentle journey; although the songs are not catchy in the traditional musical theatre sense, the melodies and harmonies are beautiful nonetheless. And a special mention must go to performer Laurence Hunt, whose robot voice remained steadfast and realistic throughout. If you like 'LaLa Land' you'll love this music; it truly is a beautiful mix of soulful folk and near-future technology, all brought to life by a talented cast.

Underbelly Bristo Square, until 26 Aug. tw rating 4/5 | [Natalie Holman]

MUSICALS

Unexpected Item In The Bagging Area (Cambridge University Musical Theatre Society)

With a full band and five-man cast, 'Unexpected...' is an absurd comedy musical set in a local supermarket. Each character is well developed with their own story arc underpinning the main tale of someone trying to have the store closed down. There are no weak cast members and each one's contribution is impressive, whether that's through vocals, comic timing, facial expressions or dance skills. The recurring tune 'Fish Cake' is a particular highlight musically, showcasing some beautiful harmonies and, though none of the other songs are as catchy as you might hope for, you'll find yourself bobbing along nevertheless. The tight choreography,

THEATRE

Birth (Theatre Re in association with Glynis Henderson Productions)

What do you remember most about your mother? Watching this beautiful and moving production, I couldn't help but think back fondly to my own childhood. Telling the story of three generations of mothers, through birth, love and loss, the incredibly slick movement and mesmerising score combined to create a masterclass in physical theatre storytelling. The clever use of a kitchen table centre stage set the scene, as actors and props seemingly disappeared and reappeared from underneath it, never stopping the flow of the piece and feeling like magic to watch. While it lacked the originality of previous Theatre Re work 'The Nature of Forgetting', I loved delving into its

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twists and turns as I saw reflected the unconditional family love I know so well.

Pleasance Courtyard, until 25 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Izzy Cutler]

**Bible John
(Bible John and The Pleasance)**

From podcasts to prestige Netflix films, the true crime documentary industry is booming. Why? 'Bible John' tackles the question head-on, presenting the story of four women growing obsessed with a true crime podcast concerning (real) serial killer Bible John. It finds the nuance in the question, being interrogative but not judgemental, making the point that women have good reason to take an interest in violent crime, when so much of it is done to them by men. It's a fantastic subject for a play and has clearly been thoroughly researched. Some rough edges - in particular a dance-filled climax that's a little overlong - ultimately do not diminish the power and intelligence of the play, which is wonderfully conceived and expertly performed.

Pleasance Courtyard, until 26 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Jon Stapley]

**Beach Body Ready
(The Roaring Girls, Absolutely Cultured, Pleasance, York Theatre Royal, Hull Truck)**

With a mixture of short comedic video clips, bursts of expressive dance and direct interaction, this show feels less like a play and more like a conversation with the audience. Fun, energetic and unashamedly body positive, the three charismatic performers share their personal tales with raw honesty; from struggling with a gym obsession, experiencing the cruel taunts of others for being fat and even being told by family you can never be loved unless you're skinny. While it took a while to warm up and felt slightly rough round the

edges in places, the friendly tone and empowering message won me over and I left feeling more than ready to take my body to the beach.

Pleasance Courtyard, until 26 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Izzy Cutler]

America Is Hard To See (Life Jacket Theatre Company)

In this breathtaking production, verbatim interviews are intercut with written scenes, traditional hymns and original music. Exploring the lives of convicted sex offenders in the rural American Miracle Village, the play deftly tackles an incredibly complex topic with a stripped back production, bringing the focus intently onto the stories told. As one of the interviews states, you should leave thinking "I don't know what to think", and you really do question what is truth and what isn't. The interrupted moments of multiple stories gradually form a narrative which is both thought-provoking and heartbreaking, as well as funny at times. Beautifully staged and masterfully acted by the entire cast, this is a piece that will stay with you for a long time.

Underbelly Cowgate, until 25 Aug.
tw rating 5/5 | [Izzy Cutler]

**Crybabies: Danger Brigade
(Crybabies in association with PBJ Management)**

To call this show absurd would be a gross understatement. Set against the backdrop of WWII, the play follows our three improbably named protagonists on an adventure behind enemy lines that's part-Python, part 'Dad's Army', and part 'Indiana Jones'. Their mission: kill a deranged Nazi scientist - what's not to love? With its fourth-wall-breaking, multi-rolling, madcap comedy it promises laughs from start to finish. There's no doubt it is at times unpolished, but this type of comedy profits from having an edge to it, and the cast's talent clearly



Photo by Stuart Stott

Blueswater Presents: Blues! (The Blueswater)

Blues doesn't have to be sad! Tight, slick and pulsating with energy, Edinburgh-based band Blueswater narrated the story of the blues, jumping along through the twentieth century until the present day. At any one time there were up to twelve musicians and singers on the stage and they gave us faithful, committed performances of the milestones of the genre such as Bo Diddley's 'Diddley Daddy' and Memphis Jug Band's 'Move That Thing'. Lieber and Stoller's explosive, teenager-defining 'Yakety Yak' deserves special mention for captivating the crowd and - obviously - for the saxophone solo. Charismatic frontman Felipe Schrieberg suffered for his art in the heat, but we loved him for it!

theSpace @ Surgeons Hall, until 24 Aug. tw rating 5/5 | [Louise Rodgers]

shines through. While the dark and nonsensical humour won't be for everyone, for those who like their comedy on the wacky side, this is right on target.

Heroes @ Boteco, until 25 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Will Norris]

Art Heist (Poltergeist / Untapped by Underbelly and New Diorama Theatre)

Wacky, weird and wonderful is the easiest way to describe this show. Set out like a gaming experience, we see the characters given their scenarios and then making decisions, as three thieves attempt to rob a gallery on the same night. A narrator sits at a desk, seemingly controlling the lighting, sound and events that follow, and inviting audience members to

participate. With such a creative use of technical elements, including live camera feeds, this play showcases some brilliant originality, and makes you question what art really is. However, while both funny and moving at times, 'Art Heist' left me wishing for a slightly more profound or emotional connection to the tale, which was attempted in the script but never quite hit home.

Underbelly Cowgate, until 25 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Izzy Cutler]

IvankaPlay (Snowy Owl)

Much ink has been spilled about Ivanka Trump and her role in the endlessly horrifying prestige drama of the Trump administration. This sharp, thoughtful essaying of the self-professed First Daughter produces

a picture of someone both revolting and endearing, with a sincere desire to do some good with her position, but a warped conception of what "good" actually entails. Actor McLean Peterson brings a skilful, brittle subtlety to Ivanka, exploring the nuances of Charles Gershman's script. Sometimes it'll lull you into sympathy for its subject, but never for too long - the mask slips, and reveals that at the core of this person is a bottomless well of callous indifference. Grim current events only serve to make this play ever more relevant.

Underbelly Cowgate, until 25 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Jon Stapley]

**Don't Be Terrible
(Standard Man Productions)**

Having a painfully unfunny character in a comedy is a risky move, but in 'Don't Be Terrible' it definitely pays off. Steve wants to learn how to make his girlfriend Sarah laugh, and turns to stand-up comic Alice to help make it happen. This intimate look at what makes good comedy is expertly performed, aping the tropes of bad stand-up while never falling into actual parody. Though the story can be somewhat confusing at times, the message is clear: comedy is a way for people to cope with their own inadequacies, and you have to think carefully before deciding to open your life to ridicule. If stand-up's not for you, this introspective look at how it works could be just the ticket.

Pleasance Courtyard, until 26 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Will Norris]

The Red (Corduroy Productions and Something For The Weekend)

The power of this play lies in its simple sincerity; there's nothing knowing or self-conscious here. Benedict is an alcoholic - 23 years sober - and on the day of his father's funeral, he is tempted to drink again, from a very



Beep Boop (Crowded Outlet / Something For The Weekend)

An amazing physical comedy exploring technology's centrality to modern life, in which Richard Saudek wholly embodies the role of a neanderthalish Mr Bean, whose obsession with technology causes violent withdrawal the moment he tries to divorce himself from it. Although billed as a one-man show, the true brilliance comes from the double act between Saudek and his onstage digital Foley artist (Nora Kaye). The concept of putting technology almost literally centre-stage is very intriguing, and it posits important questions: how important is technology and what would the show be without it? The curious contradiction between subject and form only serves to deepen the questions the play asks. A delight for anyone who appreciates physical comedy and sheer stagecraft.

Assembly George Square, until 25 Aug.
tw rating 5/5 | [Will Norris]



Photo by
Rah Petherbridge

HoneyBee (Eleanor Dillon-Reams)

At once beautifully, intricately wrought and yet entirely honest, 'HoneyBee' has a truth at its pulsing heart that you cannot help but be moved by. Billed as "Fleabag meets Kate Tempest", it is written and performed by the brilliantly talented Eleanor Dillon-Reams. We follow a young woman through the hedonistic last night of a festival, her narrative interspersed with meditations on the complexities of modern life, on how to be a good person - specifically, a good woman - and the ethical, cultural and emotional pressures we impose on ourselves, and each other. Just as you put a spoon of sugar-water out for a dying bee, Dillon-Reams offers us something we need: nourishment for the psyche, something sweet, but not cloying. We leave united, uplifted, inspired.

Gilded Balloon Rose Theatre, until 25 Aug. tw rating 5/5 | [Andy Leask]

special bottle of wine. The two-hander is wonderfully, subtly performed (by real-life father and son Bruce and Sam Alexander) and exquisitely written by Marcus Brigstocke, taking inspiration from his own recovery. One could sneer at the middle-class airs - the play takes place in a well-stocked wine cellar and compares the merits of a 1978 Chateau Lafite to Waitrose's cloudy apple juice - but doing so would miss the point: the deeply human struggle with grief, and with addiction.

Pleasance Dome, until 26 Aug.
tw rating 5/5 | [Andy Leask]

Wireless Operator (Silksheen Productions)

This tense, claustrophobic presentation of a flight team's final

bombing run, set during the Second World War, captures the harrowing experience wonderfully. Thomas Dennis is fantastic as John, the sole presence on stage. Interacting only with the distant voices of his crew, he hangs from the set, alone in the darkness. As the mission progresses - and the tension rises - he experiences memories, flashes of dialogue with his pregnant sweetheart. Most effectively, at times the perspective switches, as though the mission (and the play) are the memories haunting John after the war, forcing him to relive the feelings of fear and guilt that torment him. A powerfully poignant tribute to those who lost their lives, and those who survived, albeit scarred.

Pleasance Courtyard, until 26 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Andy Leask]

Between Us (Rachel E Thorn and Alex Keen)

This intimate, improvised play is remarkably sincere, and authentic. The performers take one meaningful fact or anecdote from the audience, about a Rachel or Alex that they know, and spin it out into a full play. There's a loose structural frame that I assume is consistent - dialogue scene / monologue / dialogue scene / monologue etc - but the content, the words and the narrative are all developed from the plot hook taken from the audience. In our performance, a family cruise ship rental became the catalyst for a relationship torn apart by class-based anxiety. That's where this differs from most other improv shows: while there were laughs (a lot of them!), they were contained within a serious, moving drama.

theSpace @ Surgeons' Hall, until 17 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Andy Leask]

Ticker (Fight in the Dog in association with United Agents)

Spencer sits in a cafe, smartly dressed, but sporting a black eye. He's there, he tells us, to meet his girlfriend, Gabi, who he is madly in love with, and proceeds to fill us in, drawing a detailed portrait of Gabi's character and of their relationship. Along the way, he introduces us to more of his friends and family in the same way, each depicted with their own distinct voices and personalities. As Spencer begins to unravel, it's apparent that all is not well. Written and performed by Fringe regular Tom Machell, 'Ticker' is excellently presented with simple but effective staging, and offers a truly arresting exploration of grief, mental health and toxic masculinity, balanced by dark humour and punctuated by unexpected twists that keep you guessing.

Underbelly Cowgate, until 25 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Daisy Malt]

Piano_Play (Charlie Russell Productions)

If the prelude doesn't grab you, worry not, and wait for the second movement, as this tale of unrequited - obsessive? - love is more than it first appears. In addition to playing the piano, Ed is playing some clever games with narrative perspective; we begin to question the reliability of his account, slowly reinterpreting what we're hearing. Music is used both as part of the narrative, and to set the mood, with a meta-commentary adding another layer of sophistication. The play's crescendo comes when we realise what Ed wants, what he needs, yet we can't offer the affirmation he so requires. For a play with so many laughs in it, the resonant silence it leaves in its wake is surprisingly powerful.

Underbelly George Square, until 26 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Andy Leask]

Standard:Elite (Hidden Track)

A dice roll can send you rocketing up to the prestigious Elites, or leave you down with the grubby Standards.

So begins 'Standard:Elite', setting its audience against each other from the get-go to tell the story of a boy from Highground and a girl from Lowground, where the twists and turns are decided upon by the Elites. Sophie MacKenzie and Elliot Hughes are our storytelling hosts, two charismatic performers who expertly keep things on the rails, themselves kept in check by a distinctly unsettling computerised voice. This absorbing tale offers many opportunities to get involved, though if you'd rather sit out and watch, you can. While its themes aren't exactly subtle, they're dissected and discussed with care and emotional intelligence.

Bedlam Theatre, until 25 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Jon Stapley]

Swim (Liz Richardson in association with the Pleasance and HOME)

"How will we swim onstage?" A good question, and one answered beautifully here. 'Swim' is a mesmerising production; a play about wild swimming, and grief, it blends live dialogue and music with pre-recorded footage and soundscapes to produce something unique. It transports the audience not so much into the water, as into the head space of a wild swimmer, and of a woman, powerless to help her friend cope with an overwhelming, all-consuming grief. The emotions conveyed are profound and sincere - given extra weight by the actors' need to overcome the sound of torrential rain and rolling thunder. Although I won't be joining them for a dip at Portobello beach tomorrow, part of me wishes I could.

Pleasance Courtyard, until 26 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Andy Leask]

The De Nova Super (A Brilliant Everything)

With its retro-futurist aesthetic, 'The De Nova Super' literally exudes atmosphere. This is partly due to the most haze I have ever seen used in a show, but also to the commitment to the world created. With home-made props and costumes, it would be easy to dismiss the show as gimmicky, but there were times when I genuinely felt transported into space, rather than sitting in a metal container. Darkly surreal, this show manages to be a philosophical discussion on the nature of existence without a word being spoken, relying on dance, physicality and comic timing to make its point. With the planet's future uncertain, we are asked if we are really ready to face not just the consequences, but our own demons.

Assembly George Square, until 26 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Will Norris]

Lovely Girls (The Hiccup Project)

With seemingly infinite energy, Cristina MacKerron and Chess Dillon-Reams use dance, physical theatre and comedy to explore the numerous roles women are expected to play in modern society. I'm exhausted just watching, as each sketch reveals a new level of ridiculous, fourth wall-

breaking truth - there is at times an almost painful honesty in the actions of the various characters, fighting back at a world which seems designed to keep women, and in this case female performers, down. Although, as they admit, calling someone "lovely" is not an insult, it becomes condescending when applied to MacKerron and Dillon-Reams; their mastery of physicality and theatricality goes so far beyond outward appearance that to label them with a single word seems impossible.

Zoo Southside, until 17 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Will Norris]

Only Bones 1.0 - Thom Monckton (Kallo Collective In Association With Aurora Nova)

Can a human really be called malleable? Thom Monckton certainly is. A consummate entertainer and physical comedian, his immediate, silent comebacks to the audience reactions showed how skilled he is at his craft. Transforming his body into other creatures and anthropomorphising his hands and feet, I really felt that he had almost become something other than simply human. There is a hypnotic, unreal quality to his work which can be almost painful to watch. The limits of setting the show in a one metre circle actually forced creativity, leading to a series of extremely memorable contortions and tricks, all performed with a knowing wink to the audience. Somehow, Monckton sells himself short in his title; he is so much more than 'only' bones.

Assembly Roxy, until 22 Aug.
tw rating 5/5 | [Will Norris]

Boar (Lewis Doherty, The North Wall and Nottingham Playhouse)

Lewis Doherty continues his one-man dominance of the Fringe with a play that's part 'Game of Thrones' and part 'Holy Grail'. After the success of 'Wolf', Doherty proves he's no one-hit-wonder, displaying creativity and talent by the bucket-load. Bringing to life numerous characters and settings seemingly all at once, it's easy to forget that you're just watching one man as you visualise characters talking to one another, ignoring the fact that this isn't technically possible. Quick thinking and always ready to play off the audience, there seems to be nothing Doherty can't do. I am already anticipating whatever follow up he brings next year, which is sure to be just as much of a hit.

Pleasance Courtyard, until 25 Aug.
tw rating 5/5 | [Will Norris]

Lucy McCormick: Post Popular (Soho Theatre, Johnson & Mackay and United Agents)

Wild, bold, unpredictable and filthy (in all senses of the word) - Lucy McCormick's show lets you know what you're in for extremely quickly. Searching for the female heroes of history through dance, song and the occasional breakdown, McCormick

throws herself into her role with hedonistic verve and astonishing physicality – an unequivocal highlight is McCormick's turn as a sword-swinging Boudicca. It builds up with wild abandon, at times feeling so diffuse you wonder where it could possibly be going. You won't guess. In the aftermath in the Courtyard, I shared a moment of eye contact with a fellow audience member as we silently processed what we had just experienced. Heroes, it turns out, are found in the most deeply, deeply unexpected places.

Pleasance Courtyard, until 25 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Jon Stapley]

Trying It On (Warwick Arts Centre and China Plate)

"If this was a play..." are the opening words of 'Trying It On'. Is it? Well, kinda. A (mostly) one-man show, it's also various parts engaging reminiscence, inventively-staged polemic, and a question posed by 70 year-old David Edgar to his younger, pseudo-revolutionary self and, by proxy, to the audience. That question isn't "what do you think of all this "Brexit-Trump stuff?" It's the Trav in the middle of the Festival – that's not hard to answer. The harder and more provocative question is "what are you actually going to do about it?" and, to those longer in the tooth, including himself, "what did you ever do about it?" If this was a play, I'd say it's a good one.

Traverse Theatre, until 25 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Bruce Blacklaw]

OO (Argonaut)

It's about to be the Millennium, and all hell is breaking loose. Well, that's what it felt like watching 'OO' anyway! The play is formed of two halves and, while I'm still not sure whether I loved it or not, it definitely made me leave the theatre thinking. The first part is a well-written and straightforward narrative, following two sisters who find themselves in the woods with a couple convinced the world will end at midnight. The second is a madcap rush through all the possible futures and dreams of this strange group. Funny, moving and featuring some brilliant performances, it's truly a weird, unusual watch – but one I wholeheartedly enjoyed.

Pleasance Dome, until 25 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Izzy Cutler]

Funny In Real Life (Rob Rouse and Helen Rutter)

Comparing comedian Rob Rouse and writer/actor Helen Rutter to Chekhov might seem a tad hyperbolic, but 'Funny in Real Life' has more than a touch of 'The Seagull' to it. A clever, self-aware (and yes, funny) play, it begins with Rouse performing stand-up, before being interrupted by his (actual) wife. What follows is an exploration of what is and is not fair game for a comic to discuss on stage. Rouse has always had great stand-up chops, but the self-reflective meta-commentary adds another layer to the audience's appreciation, while his well-honed comic timing helps him riff seamlessly with the audience,

playing off Rutter's powerful outrage. If you're a fan of comedy, you'll find a lot to love here.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, until 18 Aug.
tw rating 5/5 | [Andy Leask]

Superstar (Nicola Wren and Something For The Weekend)

The youngest of five siblings, Nicola Wren grew up desperate to impress her older brothers and sister. Getting into acting from a young age via local productions she was a big fish in a small pond, dreaming of stardom. Set against the backdrop of a comfortable middle-class upbringing, this autobiographical tale seems unremarkable – except that her eldest sibling is Chris Martin from that big famous band Coldplay. Growing up in the shadow of a pop phenomenon is inextricably part of Wren's identity, whether she likes it or not, and 'Superstar' is her attempt to reconcile her past with her future, to accept that she is enough in her own right. A charming actor, Wren's performance is slick and full of humour and plenty of self-awareness.

Underbelly Cowgate, until 25 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Daisy Malt]

The Long Pigs (WE3 and Cluster Arts)

In a disgusting, grimy abattoir, the Long Pigs are going to work. Their mission is simple – to eliminate all red-nosed clowns, but this turns out to be less straightforward than it sounds. This is a delightfully creepy and irreverent slice of clowning and physical theatre, ably brought to life by three talented performers. The show has a blasted-out, almost post-apocalyptic feel to it as our Pigs squabble over food, lick filthy objects and, occasionally, crucify each other. Their faces are covered in sores, their speech little more than grunts with the odd recognisable word. The wonderful grotesquerie keeps you grimly spellbound as you wonder what all this could possibly be building to – until the climax comes in a horrifying rush.

Assembly Roxy, until 25 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Jon Stapley]

Collapsible (Ellie Keel Productions and High Tide)

A young woman sits atop a concrete slab, several feet in the air. Rubble is beneath her, and dust shifts and falls from her perch with every movement. This is the setting as, with vivid magnetism, performer Breffni Holahan tells the moving story of Essie, whose life seems to be crumbling around her after losing her job and girlfriend. Written by Margaret Perry, this is an emotional tale of disconnecting from your body, from those around you and of feeling as though you've lost yourself. Though the sudden change in style at the end felt anticlimactic and let the show down slightly, the otherwise intricate and well-crafted script is brought to life by Holahan, whose performance is an impressive tour de force.

Assembly Roxy, until 25 Aug.
tw rating 4/5 | [Izzy Cutler]

All about ThreeWeeks Edinburgh

ThreeWeeks has been covering the Edinburgh Festival since 1996 – so this is our 24th year covering the world's largest cultural event.

CHECK OUT OUR COVERAGE

We are previewing, reviewing and interviewing at all of Edinburgh's summer festivals: the Edinburgh International Festival, Edinburgh International Book Festival, Edinburgh Art Festival and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

Interviews: We have been interviewing many of our favourite performers with new Q&As going live every day of the festival month. The interviews are conducted by our two Editors – Caro Moses and Chris Cooke.

Three To See Previews: Caro also recommended 75 shows to see at the Festival ahead of August. Check out those tips and more Three To See recommendations at ThreeWeeksEdinburgh.com.

Reviews: The ThreeWeeks review team are out there reviewing every day of the Festival, with a daily helping of reviews coming out each

morning in the TW Daily and on the website.

OUR PUBLICATIONS

There have been two editions of the popular TW Magazine this year.

The **Preview Edition** was packed with interviews and show recommendations, and was distributed around Edinburgh homes and venues at the start of the Festival.

This **Review Edition** is packed with interviews and reviews. We distribute this magazine around all the key Festival venues during the second half of the month. Or you can download a PDF copy from the website.

To get all the latest coverage, sign up to the **TW Daily bulletin**, which will land in your inbox daily throughout the festival month. Inside you will find all the latest interviews, reviews and other updates. Sign up for free at threeweeksedinburgh.com/signup

All our coverage is also accessible via the ThreeWeeks website at threeweeksedinburgh.com

GET COVERED!

We try to feature as many shows and performers as we possibly can each year, covering all the genres, with big name acts and companies alongside the very newest talent and alternative shows and performers.

For information on how to make sure you are on the radar of Editor Caro Moses, go to threeweeksedinburgh.com/getcovered

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Advertising with ThreeWeeks is a simple way to put your show and your name in front of thousands of ticket-buyers and all the key opinion formers and decision makers at the Edinburgh Festival. For details of how you can advertise in the TW Daily bulletin go to threeweeksedinburgh.com/advertising.

THISWEEK LONDON

ThreeWeeks Edinburgh is the sister magazine to ThisWeek London. We recommend Three To See in London every day of the year, plus check out more Caro Meets interviews.

Access it all at thisweeklondon.com and sign up for the year-round TW Weekly bulletin.

TW:DIY

TW:DIY is a new educational programme from the TW team that will be offering tips and advice to future talent in theatre, comedy and culture at large.

Check out our TW:DIY interviews and guides online at thisweekdiy.com

ThreeWeeks EDINBURGH

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