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CHILDREN'S SHOWS

React! Impro for Kids C theatre

Whilst this show is reasonably entertaining, there are probably better improv shows to catch this month. Attired in paint box bright t-shirts and wearing perpetual cheesy smiles, C theatre's players are like bouncy children's television presenters. However, although they're charming enough, it all feels rather average, uninspiring and jaded. The show consists of various standard improv games concocted from audience suggestions, mixed together with some fancy dress fun, but the performers occasionally struggle to sustain the games for very long and some parts are rather unimaginative and underwhelming. There's nothing glaringly wrong with the show's format or performers, and it makes for a mildly amusing 45 minutes, but the kids will forget about it the moment you walk through the exit.

C, 4-30 Aug (not 16), 1.15pm (2.00pm), £4.50-£8.50, fpp 17. [gjs]

tw rating 2/5

Norman Shadowboxer Empty Box Theatre

"Think inside the box, not outside the box" is the somewhat patronisingly delivered, and altogether confusing, moral of this otherwise enchanting tale. Norman is a life-size cardboard puppet, grappling with a deadly mosquito in his office, his struggle mirrored by an imagined boxing match. The set of this fun tale is its great strength, capturing the audience's imaginations as empty boxes are transformed to shadow puppet theatres, typewriters and lunchboxes. The humour too. is accessible for both children and parents, with Norman's parents being a particular highlight. However, the restriction of telling the entire story in rhyme, coupled with the decision to depict all the characters with bizarre French accents, limits an otherwise charming piece.

C Aquila, 5 – 22 Aug, 11.05am (11.45am), £4.50 -£8.50, fpp 16. [lvs] tw rating: 3/5

COMEDY

For 21 Nights Only

Cloud Comedy/ PBH's Free Fringe

Perhaps the people who crowded into this small pub really did have a burning desire to discover some of the, shall we say, lesser known talent at the fringe. My bet is that they just turned up because it was free. Gigs like this are a real testing-ground for up-and-coming comedians, and can make or break the inexperienced performer. Definitely break, in the case of some of the acts tonight, whose jokes fell flatter than a pancake that had been steamrollered. although posh Rosie Wilkes provided an enjoyable headline set. Come to 'For 21 Vights Only' to watch comedians cut their teeth before they hit the big time - or fade back into obscurity, as the case may be. The White Horse, 7 – 28 Aug (not 19), 6.30pm (7.25pm), free, fpp 63. [ac] tw rating 2/5



SNAP OF THE DAY: Invisible Dot's story-telling phone boxes are open for business! Check them out at Pleasance, Bristo Square, South Bridge and George Street. Photo: David Haggerton

Josie Long: Be Honourable!

Josie Long's stand-up is like breakfast in bed: a delicious treat wreathed in sunshine. Described as "a ramshackle call-to-arms". this is in fact an intelligent, tightly-structured set about what she has been up to since not coming to Edinburgh last year: talking to strangers, searching for role models, and learning to love porridge. She presents an hour of whimsical flourishes skilfully blended with political savvy, and illustrated with her trademark endearing drawings. Long has always had ebullience and charm: with this wise, clever and utterly delightful show she proves that she can back all of this up with comedic maturity. Long may she continue to light up audiences with her radiant credo of kindness and conscientiousness.

Just the Tonic at the Caves, 5 - 29 Aug (not 17, 22, 23), 7.40pm (8.50pm), £8.00 - £9.00, fpp 82. [gg] tw rating 5/5

Toulson And Harvey Used To Be Friends

In a diverse and entertaining show, the reformed Toulson & Harvey made light of their 2007 split, Jesus and their PG rating. A mixture of sketches and musical numbers, the show asked vital questions such as why Justin Lee Collins is still on TV, and why isn't Michael Barrymore isn't: as the audience started singing along with lyrics expressing the hope that Collins will be caught looking at child pornography, it became clear their PG rating was a joke in itself. The show was slightly disjointed, and lines were missed here

and there, but this contributed to a gloriously funny, Monty Python-esque series of surreal sketches

Pleasance Courtyard, 4 – 30 Aug (not 16), 5.10pm (6.10pm), £8.00, fpp 135. [amb] tw rating 4/5

Your Mum

Vinegar Knickers

Performing to an unresponsive audience, Vinegar Knickers did well to extract the number of laughs they did. These three young ladies are clearly talented writers, and their material suggested a maturity belying their tender years. Of course, there were some misses (the over-sexed mother concept was overused, drawing only perfunctory applause second time round), and some of their material took an age to reach the punchline, by which time the audience's loss of interest was palpable. Their physical comedy was excellent, however, the writing intelligent, and sketches such as their fitness fanatics one wouldn't seem out of place on TV. There could be a bright future for 'Your Mum'. Yeah.

C soco, 4-30 Aug (not 16), 2.30pm (3.20pm), prices vary, fpp 141. [amb] tw rating 3/5

Mark Allen's Go Slow

Best Medicine Management

"Czech composer, six letters, anyone?" Sitting in an armchair with the Guardian crossword, asking the audience for help with clues, Mark Allen sets the tone for his show

from the start: laid back and middle class. His gentle, family-friendly stand-up routine describes his 'Go Slow', a month in which he espoused the internet, mobile phones and digital cameras as part of a personal crusade against our society's frantic need for speed. He's a witty and perceptive story-teller, even if his observations are a little London-centric. Providing a compelling commentary on today's accelerated lifestyle, Allen's entertaining show contains a valuable message for all those of us who can't keep our eyes off the clock.

The GRV, 5 – 29 Aug (not 18), 4.40pm (6.10pm), £5.00, fpp 94. [ac]

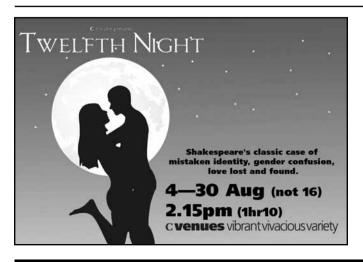
tw rating 3/5

The Rupert Pupkin Collective

Gilded Balloor

There are countless styles and genres of improv on offer at the Fringe, but these gents don't waste their time with any gimmicks. Their brand of improv comedy is classic, simple: members of the audience shout out suggestions, which the performers then use to make them laugh. It's not rocket science, but then it doesn't need to be with comedians as talented as these. With the scenes coming thick and fast, sometimes just one word or a look is enough to send the audience into hysterics. Clearly having as much fun on stage as we are off, these guys are like the coolest uncles in the world after a couple of sherries - properly funny!

Gilded Balloon Teviot, 6 - 18 Aug (not 9, 16), 5.00pm (6.00pm), £9.00 - £12.00, fpp 118. [lj] tw rating 4/5







Susan Calman - Constantly Seeking Susan Susan Calman

As you might guess from the title. Susan Calman has written a show all about herself. That's right, this is an hour of comedy dedicated exclusively to Susan Calman and her achievements, insecurities, and drunken personality crises. However, don't expect an act full of self-indulgent navelgazing: this popular Glaswegian comedian is a consummate performer who crafts her introspection into an assured and well-structured routine that never fails to entertain. It's not the kind of stand-up that will have you rolling on the floor with laughter, but Calman's gutsy, honest humour and dynamic stage presence keep the audience transfixed. Whether discussing feminism or Ferrero Rocher, she's a class act: if I were you, I'd start constantly seeking a ticket. Underbelly Cowgate, 5 – 29 Aug (not 17), 8.10pm

(9.10pm), £6.50 - £11.00, fpp 128, [ac] tw rating 4/5

Sarah Bennetto: The King and I

Storyteller's Club

If the secret to good comedy is to establish a rapport with your audience, then Sarah Bennetto is a natural; instantly putting the audience at ease, she deftly removed the barrier between performer and spectator. Let's be clear: this has nothing to do with the King of Siam or Julie Andrews. Rather, Bennetto relates the story of when, working as a late-night presenter on an obscure satellite TV channel, she was invited to lunch at Buckingham Palace. Bennetto is effortlessly charming, and you will empathise completely with her discomfort as she relates her attempts to fit in. A natural storyteller, the rhythms and cadences of her voice are compelling, drawing the listener into her world completely.

Pleasance Dome, 4 – 29 Aug (not 16), 1.30pm (2.30pm), £6.50 - £9.00, fpp 119. [al] tw rating 4/5

DANCE AND PHYSICAL THEATRE

A Compas Flamenco

Ricardo Garcia's Flamenco Flow

Offering a behind the scenes look at the world of Flamenco, this is a show that will get you on your feet, teaching you to clap, stamp and twirl your castanets like a pro (well, almost). The three performers combined impressive routines with a discussion of the history and curiosities of the dance, and were adept at creating a relaxed and friendly atmosphere which encouraged the audience to ask questions, try out instruments and join in with the steps. This would be particularly great for kids and families with an interest in dance, although for the full Flamenco glamour factor you might be better off seeing the company's straight performance in the evening. The Bongo Club, 7 - 29 Aug (weekends only),

2.30pm (3.30pm), £6.00 - £9.00, ffp 142. [crc] tw rating 3/5

A Corner of the Ocean

Jammy Voo's piece features four women, isolated from each other, yet united by shared experience. And that is as much of the narrative as I can relate. The show has moments of sublime brilliance, such as sweetly infantile dancing with a giant shadow puppet, and impressive puppetry from a pugilistic mink fur. But whilst such visuals are humorous and evocative, they are episodes bound together in a structure that fails to unite them, and so they remain divided and diluted: to quote a gentleman on the staircase afterwards: "Loved it. Got no idea what was going on though". Overall, whilst the piece can be confusing and inconsistent, it is definitely worth seeing for the impressionable and compelling imagery and music. Underbelly, 5 – 29 Aug (not 16), 17.35pm (18.35pm),

£8.50 - £10.50, fpp 145. [np]

tw rating 3/5

Inside

Jean Abreu Dance/ 65daysofstatic/ Escalator East to Edinburgh/ Hat Factory

'Inside': a title that raises immediate questions. Inside what, where and why? Set in a prison cell, this dance performance essentially becomes an exploration not only of literal, but also of the figurative incarceration we sometimes impose on ourselves. It encourages empathy to the extent that you feel you are sharing the perspective of the inmates. The ensemble of five dance to music by 65daysofstatic (appearing live) that's sometimes very loud (if you don't like that sit further back) and sometimes so silent it sounds like pure adrenaline. Loneliness, hope and abuse are investigated through a choreography that is inventive and captures the imagination; aesthetically gratifying and intellectually stimulating, it's a performance I might want to see again.

Zoo Roxy, 6 – 14 Aug, 6.25pm (7.25pm), £12.00, fpp 148. [ms] tw rating 4/5

Maria de Buenos Aires

A metaphorical history of Argentine Tango, Maria de Buenos Aires is a physical piece to be approached with the senses rather than with reason. It is a show to appreciate for its colours, its music, even its smells, but this fest for the senses doesn't make up for the difficulty involved in following the story, which is entirely sung and told in Spanish. That aside, the badly crafted, amateurish props, together with the bizarre and random choreography, make the show surreal and laughable, and the otherwise incoherent scenes are only connected by the tango, beautifully played by the onstage orchestra throughout the show, and passionately danced. Unless you're a Spanish speaker, however, give up on any hope to understand. Only recommended to tango lovers. Zoo Southside, 7 – 30 Aug, times vary, £10.00 - £ 12.00, fpp 150. [cm]

MUSIC

The Not Quite Quartet

Not Quite Quartet

tw rating: 2/5

From the first thrilling guitar solo to the last line of a ballad, 'The Not Quite Quartet' succeeded in proving that in this scenario, two really can do the work of four. With great comic timing, hilarious props and some incredible guitar, the show was an instant hit with the crowd. The audience interaction seemed to put everyone at ease and the laughs - and awe - just kept coming. With music ranging from Michael Jackson to something that sounded like Just Jack, noone was left unsatisfied. Get to The Caves and experience the magic that haunts this venue, emanating as it may from a guitar, a voice or a mysterious brown satchel.

Just The Tonic At The Caves, 5 – 29 Aug (not 17), 7.25pm (8.15pm), £5.00 - £7.50, fpp 196. [ajb] tw rating 4/5

MUSICALS AND OPERA

Hildegard of Bingen and the Living Light

Linn Maxwell

Twelfth century nun Hildegard of Bingen was an extraordinary woman. She wrote, composed, went on preaching tours, experimented with homeopathy, argued with popes and cardinals and even had time to fit in visions from the titular Living Light. Her fascinating story is brought to life vividly by Linn Maxwell, who not only embodies Hildegard but also performs some of her compositions on an array of period instruments, and handles her medieval props with such familiarity that it's easy to believe that she has used them all her life. The play might benefit from a less sedate ending. but it's strong throughout, charismatically performed and is the kind of quirky, interesting subject matter that makes for a real Fringe find.

theSpaces @ Surgeon's Hall, 6 – 28 Aug (not 8, 15, 22), times vary, £6.00 - £8.00, fpp 212. [jm] tw rating 4/5

In Touch

One Academy Productions In Association With Perfect Pitch Musicals

I knew immediately this was something special: that arresting combination of exceptional talent, creative mastery and social relevance flared through the opening scenes. Spectators froze with concentration as two agoraphobic internet users, fixated by the textual ambiguities of their secret cyber-mates, begin to lose touch with reality. Upstage four 'internet actors' spectacularly enacted the downstage internet users' online alter-egos. Poke-matches and emoticon battles literally bring the internet to life; though this drew peals of laughter, the overall tone of this play is heartbreaking. This stuff is happening now, everywhere, and I champion

the team for their flawless performance as well as their subtle and inspired aesthetic commitment in turning this problem into an accessible work of art.

Pleasance Dome, 5 – 29 Aug (odd days, not 25), 12.10pm (1.10pm), £5.00 - £7.00, fpp 212. [ah] tw rating 5/5

I Love You Because

Out Of The Bubble Theatre Company

Billed as "'Friends' meets 'Pride and Prejudice", this cheesy musical lacks both the subtle complexities of Austen and the absurd situations of Friends, comprising a bland story about dating in New York. Characters are clichéd and fail to capture the imagination, while the music and lyrics are similarly unremarkable. The six young performers, meanwhile, aren't terrible, but could have made a better fist of it had they been supported by capable direction, strong choreography and appropriate costumes; their singing is good but they look uncomfortable on stage, and appear to be awaiting their cues rather than being carried in the moment. There are comic moments, but Jane Austen would turn in her grave if she saw her masterpiece diluted thus. Pleasance Courtyard, 5 - 15 Aug, 12.40pm (1.40pm), £6.00 - £8.50, fpp 212. [ve] tw rating 2/5

THEATRE

Five Women Wearing The Same Dress

St Andrews University Mermaids

This 1993 play by Alan Ball is a thoughtful look at relationships between women and American values: when the five bridesmaids of the unseen Tracey gather in a bedroom to escape the horrors of her wedding, their secrets slowly unfurl. Each of the bridesmaids gives a convincing performance, and has the Tennessee accent almost down pat. Perhaps most watchable is Hayley Camis as the bubbly Mindy, while Emily Bell gives a dry turn as jaded Georgeanne and Jennifer Russell is perfectly cast as the ditzy Christian Frances. The script loses focus towards the end; the entrance of a man in the final ten minutes is unexpected, distinctly shifting the timbre, but it remains a quietly humorous and gently tragic piece.

the Spaces on the Mile, 6-21 Aug (not 8, 15), 10.10pm (11.40pm), £6.00 - £8.00, fpp 251. [ve] tw rating 3/5

Jacob's Ladder Pocketful Productions

This is an original piece written by Emily Moir, an Edinburgh University student, which features six seemingly unconnected characters who join together to begin a cult. The idea is interesting, and the play contains a mixture of dark and light tones, apparent in a very funny opening scene. The piece uses a mixture of theatrical conventions, and each character is left alone on stage to deliver a monologue, addressing the audience in language which is engaging and, at times, poetical. There are jumps in the narrative that don't quite make sense, but overall, the play is well acted and features a horrific ending which alludes to Greek tragedy. I'm intrigued to see what Moir will write next.

Underbelly, Cowgate, 5-24Aug (not 18), 11.10am (12.10am), prices vary, fpp 263. [cc] tw rating 3/5

Of Women And Horses I Have Known

Every good story, they say, starts with a bunch of dead people talking about other dead people. OK, so maybe that's not exactly what they say, but in this case it's what happens. Jean Hislop's relatives meet beyond the grave to try to figure out why the woman who bred the best horse of the 20th Century was so provocative while alive. The script is funny and engaging, although the best thing in this show is probably the acting, as through a balanced mix of physicality and humour the actors create memorable characters that at times interact with the audience, or get lost somewhere down memory lane. The playwright, Hislop's granddaughter Susanna Hislop, has created a play that 'redeems' this controversial figure.

Underbelly, Cowgate, 5 – 29 Aug (not 17), 8.40pm (9.40pm), £6.50 - £10.50, fpp 275. [ms] tw rating 3/5

What Would Helen Mirren Do?

Anita Parry / Parrymelia Productions

A one-woman play that follows the epic journey of single mother Susan Butterworth from the checkout to well that would be telling. Josie Melia's script doesn't threaten conventions or shift paradigms, but treats on the identity we construct for ourselves (and others) in a satisfyingly concise manner, and is likely to impress a broad demographic with its well-observed lines and effective direction. Anita Parry is massively charismatic, and impresses with a natural, effortless performance. Her impressions of DCI Tennyson are delightful, but she deserves more kudos for her handling of the show's bittersweet moments. To call this production 'feel-good' would be to understate and condescend; it scratches at deeper truths. Anybody with a mother will be touched. Hill Street Theatre, 5 – 22 Aug (not 10, 17), 7.25pm (8.35pm), £7.00 - £9.00, fpp 303. [tm] tw rating 4/5

Ovid's Metamorphoses

Pants on Fire

Nothing is destroyed, everything is transformed. The opening message of Ovid's classic is reflected through a mix of innovative staging and inventive music, performed live by the actors. The costumes, accents and songs are given a 1940s makeover, lending Tiresias's prophecies of war real urgency and drama. Perseus' struggles are also given a Second World War slant, while Narcissus watches himself on a black and white movie screen; the consistency of this reworking is remarkable, and astoundingly effective. Tiresias's return at the denouement lends the play a surprisingly contemporary relevance, without ever ramming its message down the audience's throat. Furthermore, the whole play is infused with energy, wit and humour; I cannot recommend this highly enough. Pleasance Dome, 4 – 30 Aug, 12.00pm (1.15pm), £7.50 - £10.00, fpp 277. [al] tw rating 5/5

Pedestrian

Bristol Old Vic, Theatre Bristol & SEArED

In this one man show, Tom Wainwright comes over something like a tranquillised Jim Carrey, delivering a physical and engaging performance. Seemingly pursued by the anthropomorphic presence of his dead goldfish, Tom takes us on a journey through the realities of broken Britain and the murky corners of his disaffected subconscious. Cultural relevance abounds, from the booming backdrop of disposable dance music to cheeky digs at skinny soya lattes to a fantastic interpretation of the ubiquitous street charity fundraiser 'chuqqers'. Wainwright must be commended for this piece that embodies the principles of fringe theatre: originality, social consciousness, humour and innovation. You could see a mediocre Shakespeare adaptation this August, but why not take a leap of faith instead? See 'Pedestrian'.

Underbelly, 5 - 29 Aug (not 16), 7.00pm (8.10 pm), £6.50 - £10.50, fpp 278. [rj]

tw rating 4/5

Robbie Wakes

Double Edge

'Robbie Wakes' is stylistically beautiful but lacking in substance. The plot follows one day in the life of little Robbie, a victim of the Tube terror attack in July 2005, as he prepares to walk again; the interesting thing here is that Robbie is a three-dimensional Tim Burtonesque puppet. Whilst the protagonist is visually entrancing and masterfully controlled, the purpose of this stylistic puppet seems to be to embellish what is otherwise a repetitive plot. Each visit Robbie receives is too short, too lacking in substance to be ative. However the synchroni ensemble's use of different props to enact Robbie's active imagination is entrancing. This feature, if not the simplistic plot, is worthy of

Underbelly, 5 - 15 Aug, 1.30pm (2.30pm), £7.50 -£10.00, fpp 284, [sh] tw rating 3/5

The plot of 'King Lear', the eponymous king

Shakespeare For Breakfast

deciding to divide his realm among his three daughters and offering the largest share to the one who loves him best, sounds like a premise for a show on Channel 4. This must have occurred to Shakespeare for Breakfast too - back at the Fringe for their nineteenth successive year - as they set their version of the revered classic in a reality TV station, featuring such programmes as Who Wants to be a Million-heir, Gok Wang and Jeremy Vile. A novel format was undermined by too many attempts at contemporary satire, rather than simply parodying the play itself.

That said, as introductions to Lear go, it sure beats reading it at school.

C, 4 - 30 Aug, 10.00am (10.55am), £4.50 - £8.50, fpp 287. [amb]

tw rating 3/5

The Changeling

University of the Arts London Drama Society

The Changeling is the Fringe as it should be: theatre at its most innovative and intoxicating. An exceptionally strong devised piece based around Rana Dasgupta's absurd, macabre and often hilarious story, which is staged with brilliant inventiveness, and performed by a versatile and talented cast. Set during an epidemic in 2020 London, a man searches for a word that will save his friend. With ingenious staging, scenes move effortlessly from busy streets to dank hotels as a man walking in the rain (mimicked by water dripping through punctured tinfoil) carries a suitcase that opens to unravel a sheet and pillow. Though the script occasionally dips, this is theatre at its most alive; a hair's breadth from five stars.

Underbelly, Cowgate, 5 - 15 Aug, 11.30am (12.30pm), £6.00 - £10.00, fpp 238. [mm] tw rating 4/5

David Leddy's 'Sub Rosa'

Fire exit in Association with The Citizens Theatre

Murder, intrigue, Siamese twins that aren't really Siamese (or twins), and a house in which almost everything creaks are the ingredients for a 'red velvet revolution'. This production engages all your senses to create an atmosphere of mystery. Narrative by gruesome narrative, we piece together the story of Flora as we move around the old house and enter different rooms where the characters await us. Although there is no action, the character's monologues are so vivid it makes absolutely no difference. The actors are spell-binding and appear to be caught in limbo at particular moments of the story, almost becoming part of their surroundings. The direction makes wonderful use of the house, and extreme care for detail

Hill Street Theatre, 5 – 30 Aug (not10, 17, 24), times vary, £7.00 - £15.00, fpp 241. [ms]

tw rating 4/5

Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead

The Rude Mechanicals

This company don't manage to completely suppress the wit of Stoppard's brilliant play about Hamlet's bemused friends, but they give it a pretty good try. The poetry of the writing is murdered by prosaic, awkward delivery, its spirit quashed by weak voices, and its philosophising muddied by distractingly chaotic staging. I sat, as did fellow audience members, literally open mouthed at the mess that unfolded. The Shakespeare scenes that punctuate the story are especially badly acted, ruined by, to borrow one of Stoppard's phrases, "cheap melodramatic tricks". Indeed, when Rosencrantz and Guildenstern encounter the travelling players, all we can think as we hear the lines "we're just not getting anywhere" and "what a shambles", is... exactly.

C central, 7 – 14 Aug, 5.20pm (6.50pm), £7.50 -£9.50, fpp 284. [dp]

tw rating 1/5

THREEWEEKS IN EDINBURGH

Publishers Chris Cooke, Caroline Moses

Concept and content © ThreeWeeks Publications.

ThreeWeeks Publications is owned by UnLimited Publishing, a division of UnLimited Media, Unicorn House, 221-222 Shoreditch High Street, London, E1 6PJ. Tel: 020 7099

Daily printing by Smart Design & Print.