# Thee Weeks in Edinburgh

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#### **CABARET**

Kabarett: Alternative Variety Itsy Collective

As the name suggests this is cabaret, and features a selection of samples from other Fringe shows, meaning each night has an entirely different line up. The night I went, it was poor: a bumbling, stuttering compere hashed through the introductions, a painstakingly long and fumbling set up led into the performance of a lazy first band not even worth naming. The night's performers varied wildly from a stripping gay spoken word maestro to a crowd silencing comedian (Sarah Hendricks). Though The Maydays survived unscathed, it was Pippa The Ripper's sublime hula hoop act that saved the show from being an absolute catastrophe. The only advice for attending this show is to check ahead who's on, or keep your fingers crossed.

Voodoo Rooms, 9 – 27 Aug (not 11, 18, 25), 7.15pm (8.15pm), free, fpp 83. [ta] tw rating 2/5

### **CHILDREN'S SHOWS**

Alice's Adventures Flying High Theatre Co 'Alice's Adventures' arguably faces a problem - in the wake of Disney's 2010 adaptation, is a young audience ready to appreciate Lewis Carroll's tale when it is devoid of the million-dollar Hollywood treatment? Well, with regard to Flying High's adaptation, the answer seems to be a resounding yes. From the Mad Hatter's tea party to the musical-fuelled finale, 'Alice's Adventures' wins the ardent attention of every audience member. An energetic young cast deliver a slick performance capturing the kookiness and humour that is synonymous with Carroll's Wonderland tales. The eccentricity of the storyline escapes the understanding of many of the children, but this only means accompanying adults are left thoroughly entertained by several cleverly inserted, laughter-inducing quips. Go see! Augustine's, 7 – 22 Aug (not 16), 1.25pm (2.10pm), £5.00 - £7.00, fpp 8. [kr]

#### The Mole Who Knew It Was None Of His **Business** Kipper Tie Theatre

When a country mole wakes up to find someone has left him a nasty surprise. he goes in search of the culprit. Along the way he meets a cast of weird and wonderful animals, like a hippy goat and a pair of flies who are experts in dung detection. Kipper Tie Theatre use narration and song to tell a sweet story with the perfect balance of humour and heart. The versatile and engaging actors are great at getting children involved with catchy refrains and counting games, and the characters - particularly Hare - are actually among the funniest I've seen at the Fringe this year. This show will charm you, whatever your age.

C, 4 - 30 Aug, 10.00am (10.45am), £4.50 - £8.50, fpp 14. [crc]

tw rating 4/5

tw rating 4/5



**SNAP OF THE DAY:** The cast of Vive le Cabaret, with special quest star - for one night only - Sir Walter Scott. Photo: Kate Edwards

# COMEDY

AAA Stand-Up Late Bound And Gagged

Despite being one of the latest shows at the fringe, 'AAA Stand-Up Late' was an incredibly professional affair. Steve N Allen was an excellent compère, warming the crowd and identifying the possible trouble-makers for the two acts listening back stage. First on was Irishman Ryan McDonnell, a witty and incredibly brave comic, who brought up a number of taboo subjects and rode over them with ease. The second act was Erich McElroy, an American recently awarded British citizenship. His fresh take on Anglo-American comedy appealed to the packed audience, although some members appeared to prove the old cliché that Americans don't understand the concept of irony. If you want some Apollo-quality live comedy, then brave the heat of the Cellar.

Pleasance Courtyard, 4 - 30 Aug, 11.00pm, £5.00 -£9.50, fpp 20, [aib] tw rating 4/5

# Greg Davies: Firing Cheeseballs At A Dog

Avalon Productions Ltd

A near-death experience prompted Greg Davies to look back on his life and draw together the random instances of pure, inconsequential joy (including the titular canine-related incident) that make him glad to be alive. He gleefully dips into his treasuretrove of anecdotes about his family, his school-days, and his time as a depressed

drama teacher, all of which he illustrates in the old school way with an old school blackboard. Davies may not be breaking any new comedic boundaries here, but he is such a superb raconteur that it is impossible not to warm to him. Like meeting up with an old friend with a life-time's worth of funny stories, it may not be edgy, but it is eminently

Pleasance Courtyard, 4 - 29 Aug (not 16), 9.45pm (10.45pm),  $\pounds8.00 - £10.50$ , fpp 68. [gg] tw rating 4/5

# Henry Paker's 3D Bugle

Best Medicine Management / PBJ Management

'Henry Paker's 3D Bugle' doesn't contain any bugles, but it is very funny. Instead, the award-winning comedian contemplates the strange new amalgamation of cardigan and hoodie worn by so-called hoodigans. How would a hoodigan accost you? Would he demand enough money for the latest Gabriel Marquez novel in desperate desire for a dose of magical-realism? Would he, in a polite stupor, insist on giving you money instead? An intelligent, imaginative, literary set from the Times cartoonist included an impressive impromptu five minute sketch - entirely in French - about 'Le Petit Meaulnes.' At times acky, but always wonderful, Henry Paker is a 👚 eyes and grin equally wide and full of effusive very funny man and I laughed a lot.

- £5.00, fpp 69. [mm]

tw rating 4/5

# The Cheeky Beggars Banquet

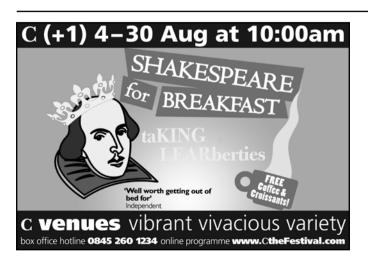
The Cheeky Beggars

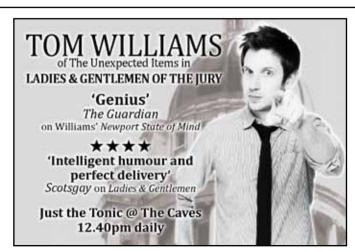
Niftily adrift of the mainstream, this banquet had me choking on my shortbread (in a good way). Warning: This show is not for the prudish or faint hearted. However, it certainly is for those who want the darkly surreal with a witty edge, and to ask themselves whether they did really just laugh out loud at the clown unaware of the kid with a nut allergy in the pecan pie throwing contest. A sketch show should have you wanting to go home and repeat the entire thing verbatim to your girlfriend without realising you can't possibly do it justice. The Cheeky Beggars had me laughing all the way back to the station - it was definitely worth the long walk

Laughing Horse @ The Metropole Café, 6 - 28 Aug (not 8, 15, 22), 5.00pm, free, fpp 43. [mb] tw rating 4/5

# Jeff Leach: Leach On Society - Free

I can only assume that Jeff Leach is an altruist. Many performers on the Free Fringe are there to hone their skills, or build an audience, but on the strength of this comedic tour-de-force. Leach is in need of neither. From the moment he bounds on stage, charm, he had the packed venue captivated The GRV, 5 - 29 Aug (not 16), 7.50pm (8.50pm), £2.50 wholly. His routine, ranging over his life and







cont>> loves, was surprisingly honest, and never less than hilarious. At times it was unexpectedly risqué for a lunchtime slot - you have been warned - and I suspect Leach would be more at home headlining one of the big venues in a late night timeslot. Next year,

Laughing Horse @ The Counting House, 6 – 19 Aug, 1.00pm (1.45pm), free, fpp 76. [al] tw rating 5/5

#### Matthew Hardy - Willy Wonka Explained: The Veruca Salt Sessions

Matthew Hardy

I'd dearly love to give this show a stunning review because the premise is so delightful: Hardy, a troubled comic obsessed since childhood with Veruca Salt (from the 1971 film 'Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory'), contacts Julie Dawn Cole - the child actress who played the role - convincing her to perform in a two-hander based on an analysis of their various neuroses. The result is this touching, funny but muddled set of monologues. Both performers are terrifically likeable - Cole is cynical but cheerily confessional while Hardy has excellent comic delivery and seems genuinely unsettled and involved, but the show is rather too scripted and leaves the audience to imagine, rather than experience, the potential of this bizarre

Pleasance Courtyard, 7 - 10, 13 - 29 Aug, 7.00pm, £7.50 - £9.50, fpp 95. [kb] tw rating 3/5

#### Piq With The Face Of A Boy: The Girl With The Arms Made From Marrows

Musical Comedy Lab/ Laughing Horse Free Festival It's comfortable and competent, but it's nothing special. From the outset, the two talented chaps behind 'Pig With The Face Of A Boy' give the first impression of a duo a la The Amateur Transplants: a frank and no holds barred collection of song writing that will leave you writhing as intensely as your smile is wide. The subject matter, however, swiftly begins to get flabby, soft and slightly trivial. Certainly go if you want cheering up, and want to leave the show with a slight grin and slightly chirpier than when you went in. You won't leave raving, though; these songs certainly are shiny and comic, but they are

Laughing Horse @ The Three Sisters, 5 – 17 Aug, 5.00pm (5.50pm), free, fpp 110. [mb] tw rating 3/5

# Robin Ince - Carl Sagan Is Still My God

Robin Ince/PBH's Free Fringe

not worth writing home about.

For a comedian, Robin Ince is a very serious man with serious interests and this lunchtime show is, accordingly, less about telling jokes and more about indulging in one of his interests, his love of science. Ince introduces a series of guest acts with an ostensible link to science, who deliver material ranging from a potted history of space travel to a foray into reproductive biology, in between times regaling us with material that falls somewhere between stand-up and lecture. Often conveying a profound sense of wonder about the universe. Ince's routine sometimes strays into invective, as he embarks on angry rants about things he believes are irrational or anti-scientific. This alienating tendency ultimately jeopardises his attempt to prove that science isn't just for nerds.

The Canon's Gait, 7 – 18 Aug, 12.10pm (1.10pm), free, fpp 116. [ac] tw rating 3/5

#### DANCE AND PHYSICAL THEATRE

120 Birds

Liz Lea Dance

tw rating 3/5

This show tells the story of four dancers who tour the world in the 1920s, and the resulting mix of choreography is beautifully presented, while the spirit of the era is conjured by some amazing archive footage - coupled with classic music - that is displayed on a projector screen at the back of the stage. The costumes are also beautiful and add to the allure of the show. However, I did find the narrative slightly weak and felt that Liz Lea's character could have been more developed. Nevertheless, the show is charming in places, and includes an utterly enthralling tango. Furthermore, it does feel like a celebration of dance, and the homage to Anna Pavolva is touching. Dance Base - National Centre for Dance, 11 - 22 Aug (not 16), times vary, £3.00 - £5.00, fpp 151. [cc]

#### Haunted

Dance Box Theater

From demonic possession to Catholic exorcism and suggestions of voodoo, 'Haunted' is an exploratory dance piece that draws on different cultural paradigms to explore its central theme. Beautifully integrating music and movement, three troubadours at the back of the stage use simple instruments and snatches of sung melody to provide an evocative soundtrack for the graceful and carefully-choreographed motions of the two accomplished dancers. Yet, for all this artistry, I might have expected the piece to be a little more... well, haunting; or to have more of an emotional impact. This is a show that gets everything right, yet is missing an unidentifiable something that keeps it a hair's breadth away from true brilliance.

Dance Base, 11 – 22 Aug (not 14, 16), times vary, £5.00, fpp 148. [ac]

tw rating 4/5

#### **THEATRE**

#### Memoirs Of A Biscuit Tin

Maison Foo

If you think it impossible for a person to act like a floor or a wall, think twice. Mrs. Benjamin's house is missing its owner. and its walls, floor and chimney remember snippets of her life, from her youth through to her lonely old age. A mix of theatre, puppetry and comedy, this play is a vivid and touching portrayal of aging and the impact it has on our lives. Bethany Sheldon, Kathryn Lowe and Jennifer Sunmer's unforgettable performances speak directly to the audience's hearts; their antics, the exquisite set and the beautiful music draw the audience into a fairy tale world of memories and recollection. An endearing tale for all ages, this show is a must see at Fringe 2010. Pleasance Courtyard, 4 – 30 Aug (not 6, 17), 2.00pm (3.00pm), £6.50 – £9.50, fpp 271. [clm] tw rating 5/5

#### Lockerbie: Unfinished Business

David Benson directed by Hannah Eidinow / Festival Highlights

An opening demo of how to make a bomb was unexpected, and worked both to engage the audience immediately and introduce this grieving father's bitter contention that Lockerbie might have been avoided. David Benson sensitively conveys an account of the incident that made Jim Swire's life a relentless campaign for truth and justice, to avenge his daughter's premature death by terrorist atrocity, supported by news footage and documentary snippets of the surrounding debacle. Regrettably for Swire, the latter was not sufficient to move Margaret Thatcher; theatre goers might be more easily forgiven if they balk at his grief, however sympathetic or empathetic they are. That said, his questions remain as relevant today as they were 20 odd years ago.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, 4 – 29 Aug (not 18), 2.30pm (3.40pm), £5.00 - £8.00, fpp 267. [cm] tw rating 3/5

# Attempts

The write-up in the Fringe Programme does not do justice to this short, but interesting, show. The words 'swamped by modern consumerism' instantly make the show sound horribly earnest and hard work to watch, but in fact, 'Attempts' provides a fascinating thirty minutes, with short set pieces with subject matter ranging from an internet paedophile grooming schoolgirls to a voice-over detailing the idea of the perfect woman. The identical masks worn by the players are sinister and the play certainly hits a nerve, while back projection was used to great effect to show the domination of technology, and our desensitisation to horrible news stories. I wouldn't have chosen to go and see this play, but I'm very glad I've seen it.

The Vault, 8 – 15 Aug, 1.25pm (2.00pm), £4.00, fpp

tw rating 3/5

# **Clinical Lies**

Sunday's Child

Eva O'Connor is a star in the making; beauty and charisma allied with raw natural talent. Regrettably, too much about her play is dramaturgically amiss. Heavy themes of rape, abortion and how these affect nineteen year old Amy are explored with mask, physical theatre, audience interaction and unnecessary black-outs which jolt the

action. O'Connor's characterisation and physicality save the piece, but the surplus of stereotypical characters serves only to lower the tone of the whole. However, the monologues are engaging, the choreography insightful, and if further gestures to ease the physicality into place were incorporated, this could make a workable one woman show. theSpaces on the Mile @ The Radisson, 6 – 21 Aug (not 8, 15), 6.05pm (7.00pm) £7.00 - £8.00, fpp 238.

tw rating 2/5

#### Stop, Look, Listen

Taking the theme of community, this play centres around a group of people forced to come to terms with the tragic death of a neighbour. The four actors played multiple characters, complete with accents and mannerisms that made every persona appear well conceived, and the playful start to the piece, including a wonderful radio station segment, lulled the audience into assuming this was going to be a simple story. Instead the more serious aspects of the script begin to shine through, leaving the audience without doubt as to the talent of the actors. The use of synchronised stamping added an extra dimension to the piece and the intricately choreographed use of four chairs showed an excellent attention to detail.

theSpaces @ Surgeons Hall, 5 - 21 Aug, 4.05pm (4.55pm), £5.00 - £7.00, fpp 292. [sj] tw rating 4/5

#### Spitting Love

Roundhouse Productions

Join retiring loan shark Harry the Loop on his final job, collecting payment from a romantic writer whose vices have got the better of him. Whilst the basis of this show - a criminal's last night on the game - is hardly innovative, the playwright does use it as a springboard for some more interesting twists and turns. However, at times I couldn't help feeling as if I'd heard something like it before, and the revelations were perhaps overly laboured. The two actors were very good in their own right, but seemed to have difficultly gelling as a pair. In its best moments the play was tense and poetic, but it needs serious tightening up. Hill Street Theatre, 5 - 19 Aug (not 10, 17), 9.00pm (9.50pm), £5.00 - £9.00, fpp 291. [crc] tw rating 2/5

# Tristram Shandy

**Reverend Productions** 

In this curious adaptation of Laurence Sterne's novel, Reverend Productions put their own stamp on the flamboyant autobiographic tales of the unfortunate yet colourful Tristram Shandy. The theme of time is explored with clocks strewn about the set and the concept of interweaving the present with the eighteenth-century: a therapist attempts to delve into Shandy's memoirs and discover the truth about the calamities which peppered his childhood. Although not every performer is enthralling, the writing and staging are well-conceived - especially as the therapist is forced to play parts in Shandy's scenarios, symbolising her attempts to probe his psyche. This could be funnier and more farcical, and the ending seems sudden and mismatched, but this is original, absorbing

theSpaces @ Surgeons Hall, 7 – 17 Aug, 6.00pm (7.10pm), £8.00 - £10.00, fpp 299. [gjs] tw rating 3/5

Peters Productions

Centred on a 'white painting, with white diagonal lines', Yasmina Reza's 1994 play 'Art' is an amusing portrayal of the more pretentious side of the contemporary art scene. We meet Serge just after he has bought an expensive painting that best friend Mark believes to be 'a pile of shit'; amusing arguments ensue from here, and friend Ivan delivers an endearingly comical performance as the anxious middle-man. Expertly directed and with a masterful command of the wordy script, the cast captures every nuance of the melodramatic characters as they bicker about art. life, culture, and their friendship. Reaching a highly entertaining climax, 'Art' invites you into a world where hyperbolic pretension has never been so amusing: A well-spent seventy-five minutes.

Sweet Grassmarket, 9 - 22 Aug, 8.40pm (9.55pm), £7.50- £9.50, fpp 228. [sh] tw rating: 4/5

#### At Sundown

CalArts Festival Theater

'At Sundown' is interesting for the way it explores this collectively told autobiography both physically and lyrically, and it is also an example of innovative direction, with an effective use of props and sound creating an atmosphere full of potential. Sometimes, however, the actors' movements are sloppy and out of rhythm, and the insertion of Michael Jackson's 'Thriller' dance is bizarre and confusing. Since this piece is a collection of memories, some element of disjointedness is to be expected, but the fact that different actors repeatedly perform certain sections is bewildering. Having said this, moments when dementia and mental illness are touched upon are truly evocative, and provide a poignant climax to this creative production. Venue 13, 7 - 21 Aug (not 16), times vary, £5.00 -

tw rating 3/5

#### Expectations

Gothenburg English Speaking Theatre

Even without reading the programme, the audience can guess that this new work by Kristina Brändén Whitaker is based on real experience. 'Expectations' tells the stories of two couples who deal differently with the news that their baby will be affected by a rare chromosome disorder, and have to live with their choice. The couples are strangers, one is English, the other Swedish, yet they take similar journeys, and the parallels of their experiences are cleverly staged and underlined by Ricardo Sousa's original music. The cast's performance is extremely human; the audience was moved to tears, especially after the mothers' monologues. A story of love and pain, 'Expectations' affects everyone, whether they're acquainted with the experience or not.

Pleasance Dome, 4-6, 7-15, 17-22, times vary, £ 5.00 - £ 9.00, fpp 249. [clm]

tw rating 4/5

# The Terrible Tales Of The Midnight Chorus

A macabre fusion of puppet show and gothic Victoriana - by way of Tim Burton - this is an oddly enchanting show, possessed of an ethereal, wistful charm. The troupe present a handful of tales, each with a suitable heart breaking ending, reflecting a dark, fairytale aesthetic. The performers sing and dance, as well as skilfully operating the puppets, and the whole thing is magnificently presented. If the show has a flaw, it's that it's too short, and that the morals of these cautionary tales is not always clear. Of course, a 'Scooby Doo' style didactic moral message would be out of place, but some sense of summation would undoubtedly enhance the performance's effectiveness, without damaging the tone. Bedlam Theatre, 08 – 20 Aug, 4.15pm (5.05pm), £7.00 - £8.00, fpp 295. [al] tw rating 4/5

# (Bye)Polar

This impressive new play explores depression and its destructive effects on a young girl and her family with a maturity rarely seen in student plays. Through intense monologues interspersed with acutely observed dialogue, we see Jane struggling with bipolar disorder whilst her well-meaning, but hopeless, parents painfully fail to help her. Though the play lacks dramatic punch and some of the characters fall into easy stereotypes, it is an assured debut and contains some powerful, heart wrenching moments. The dramatic techniques are not overly sophisticated and the staging is poor - the father, in a standout performance, delivers his last and best speech almost off stage - but this is an intelligent and sensitive play performed with passion and great sensibility.

theSpace @ Venue 45, 9 - 19 Aug (not 15), 2.10pm (3.00pm), £3.50, fpp 236. [mm] tw rating 3/5

The power of the imagination is stretched to

# **Following Wendy**

Jam Jar Productions

the limit in this dark rendering of a classic tale, whilst the fine line between reality and delusion becomes almost non-existent. Gone is the innocence of childhood to be replaced by a harsh realism and events rather forgotten. Stylistically, the combination of physical theatre and music made for an engaging piece, although elements of the narrative appeared somewhat jilted and repetitive. The plot, which at first seems incoherent and confusing, is clarified in the

closing minutes, and this makes for a vexing conclusion that is well worth sticking out for. Challenging our preconceptions of the world of Neverland, this is a bold attempt to reinvent a well loved story.

C soco, 4-21 Aug, 4.35pm (5.35pm), £6.50 - £9.50,

tw rating 3/5

#### Soho Storeys

Enormous potential, but rough round the edges. Set in the 1950s, 'Soho Storeys' charts the lives of a group of migrants. The piece opens to the sound of a live jazz band that creates a real buzz. However, this atmosphere is undermined by the cast's tentative singing and dancing during each musical number. While the general direction and choreography of the production is slick, and the versatile set is used to create many interesting scenes, the plot is divided between so many characters that any empathy is lost because the scenes are too short. Having said this, 'Soho Storeys' has the makings of a great musical drama, a few kinks just need to be ironed out first.

Pleasance Courtyard, 18-21 Aug (not 17), times vary, £8.50 - £11.00, fpp 289. [sh]

tw rating 3/5

## Firing Blanks

Fine Chisel Theatre Company

An affluent, happy man has a loving, functional relationship with his wife, and they're in complete agreement about starting a family. Lacking the sperm to impregnate her himself, there's nevertheless a viable medical procedure for conception – a sperm donor. And we're supposed to feel sorry for him? Pity him, with his halcyon existence, that Plan A for a we'en fell through but there's a reasonably convenient Plan B? 'Firing Blanks' is a sweet but self-obsessed play, in which an issue that is (in the grand scheme of things) a misfortune is treated like a major tragedy. It's redeemed somewhat by its rather sentimental ending, a talented, likeable cast, and odd flashes of wit in the script. Unfortunately, though, and to risk using a terrible pun, it's ultimately ill-conceived. Underbelly, 5 - 29 Aug (not 22), £6.50 - £10, fpp 251. [kc]

tw rating: 3/5

# Markus Makavellian's International Order

proudExposure

Exuberance and extravagance abound in this poetic masterpiece, whose lyrics cleverly draw upon social issues that are often not spoken of in such frank terms. The opening scatological topic is broached using a toilet-seat-mime that is at first rather disgusting, but then marvellously comic. Once encouraged to abandon all inhibition and embrace the lyrical magic of Makavellian, it becomes impossible to look away. The fluidity of his poetry is punctuated by subtle lighting changes, and introductions help to make sense of his racy speeches whose subject matter varies from Lady Gaga to a touching dedication to his son. Utterly flamboyant, brutally honest and totally endearing, this racy poetic performance is not for the prude, but is wonderfully captivating.

Underbelly, 7 - 29 Aug (not 16), 6.00pm 6.50pm), £6.50 - £10.50, fpp 270. [sh]

tw rating 5/5

# THREEWEEKS IN EDINBURGH

Publishers Chris Cooke, Caroline Moses

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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.