

ThreeWeeks IN EDINBURGH

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CHILDREN'S SHOWS

Brilliant Books For Kids

Toby Mitchell
Hidden behind the trees and boozy picnic tables of the Pleasance Courtyard lies a bouncy baked Alaska, an inflatable igloo just for the wee ones; with its giant beanbags, this wonderfully cosy venue lends itself brilliantly to story time. Getting through six stories may seem an ambitious task, and holding the attention of a large group of under fives for 45 minutes difficult, yet the girls succeeded in keeping the vast majority interested with stories such as 'Cows That Type' and the mildly comic 'Demon Teddy'. It might have been improved by a little more dialogue, and greater participation between the children and the storytellers, but I suspect that may be limited by book choice (they change daily).

Pleasance Courtyard, 3 - 21, 26 - 28 Aug, 1.45pm (2.30pm), £4.00 - £5.00, fpp20, tw rating 3/5 [lc]

The Mole Who Knew It Was None Of His Business

Kipper Tie In Association With C Theatre

Who doesn't find poo funny? That's the logic behind 'The Mole Who Knew It Was None Of His Business' and it works, mostly. The endearing mole travels about looking for the animal who poed on his head, and those we meet are of variable quality: the cowboy horse and Somerset cow delight, but the hippy goat is a good idea that doesn't work. Perky, if sometimes inaudible songs keep the kids happy but the jokes for adults fall flat. Great fun when poo focused - the faces of the animals doing their business are wonderful and the poo props delightfully icky - this show nonetheless feels ten minutes too long for a young audience. Needs less padding and more poo.

C, 3 - 29 Aug (not 15), 10.00am (11.00am), £4.50 - £8.50, fpp26, tw rating 3/5 [ab]

John Hegley Family Word Ship

Effortlessly funny and informative, John Hegley appears on stage armed with nothing but a school projector, ukulele and a trolley full of his slides and stories about portable tellies in blankets biting repair men. With his ruffled suit and thick glasses, Hegley resembles the classic unbothered teacher, leading the crowd through his show of 'alphabetic disorder' teaching us about everything from the Daleks to Hamsters in jam jars: I've never once before been so interested in the humble guillemot. Although this is a children's show, Hegley is funny enough to make even the old and tired laugh with his wit, poetry, songs, and general aura of despair. Children or not, I urge you to get your ticket.

Pleasance Courtyard, 3 - 18 Aug, 4.10pm (5.10pm), £9.00 - £12.00, fpp100, tw rating 4/5 [cd]

COMEDY

Magic

Hiatus Theatre in association with the Scat Pack
This show's listing says it all: comedy first,



SNAP OF THE DAY: This, ladies and gentlemen, is the ThreeWeeks Review Team 2011, all 85 of them. Together they will review more shows than any other review team at the festival - as you read this they'll be approaching their 250th show so far this Fringe! Look out for their reviews in the ThreeWeeks daily, weekly and eDaily editions, online at www.ThreeWeeks.co.uk and via iFringe. Photo: Kat Gollock

then magic. We learn the secrets of our blundering magicians' tricks at the same time as them, so intentionally or not, the 'mail-order' set had a few wobbles and curtain-twitches which let seasoned magic fans know precisely how a trick was done. But, why so serious? This is comedy-magic, and the characters' relationships made for a show which can appeal to younger magic fans, but the rest of us were left hanging when these personalities were abandoned in lieu of another bodged illusion. Though a couple of impressive card tricks nudged up the wow factor, it was barely a distraction from the MDF set or the multicoloured handkerchiefs hidden up a sleeve.

C Soco, 3 - 29 Aug (not 16), 5:10pm (6:05pm), £4.50 - £9.50, fpp120, tw rating 2/5 [ja]

Diane Spencer: All Pervading Madness

Best Medicine Management
Beginning with a madcap retelling of an incident involving her mother and a ferret, Diane Spencer's 'All Pervading Madness' certainly lives up to its title. What follows is the quirky tale of a late night journey home and the extraordinary and inconceivable obstacles faced on the way. Spencer's storytelling is ballsy, often displaying a complete disregard for 'oversharing' at times. It is easy to get lost in the myriad side stories, and when we're erratically snapped back to the main, it can take a second to remember what we're going back to. That said, Spencer cleverly weaves these loose ends into a hilarious conclusion, whilst her easy charm

and self-deprecating humour infuse the room as much as the madness does her life.
Gilded Balloon Teviot, 3-28 Aug (not 16), 5.45pm (6.45pm), £8.00- £9.00, fpp66, tw rating 3/5 [am]

Lights! Camera! Improvise!

Scat Pack

This collection of comedians are accomplished, but it is the compère and the cinema setting that make this improv act shine. Each show is based on a film from the compère's collection, and his role in the proceedings helps Scat Pack to avoid some of the major pitfalls of improvised comedy, as the troupe don't ignore their errors, but highlight them: if a character contradicts the plot, gets a name wrong, or forgets an affectation then the compère 'pauses' the action, mocks it, and then forces the players to improvise an explanatory scene. It's an endearing device, and works well. However, though they are a competent team of improvisers, there's disparity of ability between the players that holds this back from being five stars.

C, 3 - 29 Aug (not 16), 19.15pm (20.15pm), £6.50 - £11.50, fpp109, tw rating 4/5 [jfb]

Matador

Asher Treleaven

Asher opens his show with a funny and strangely moving re-enactment of a bullfight. Once the bull is dead, the real topic of conversation for the night is revealed: Asher's reaction to racism. Combining wonderful storytelling with some great physical comedy

[the impression of a rampaging sheep is worth the price of a ticket alone], Asher takes the audience on a trip through Australian culture, trying to discover how best to deal with racists, and cleverly linking it all back to the bull fight at the beginning. This brilliantly performed show is intelligent and thought provoking, and a lot more interesting than your average hour of stand-up.

Pleasance Courtyard, 3 - 28 August (not 9,16), 8.40pm - 9.40pm, £8.50 - £10.50, fpp40, tw rating 4/5 [mc]

Squirrel Party

Reptile House

This parody of 90s Children's television tells the darkly comic story of host Chesley Chippenham's collapsing marriage overlaid on the wonderfully contrasting background of light hearted animal-friendly fun. While the central premise of the play is superbly well done, and the ménage-a-trois between the host, his wife and Andy the handyman manages to be both believable and extremely funny, this is let down by a series of limp and unfunny appearances by various one-off characters, 'Granger the paedophile' being a particularly inappropriate low point. At its best Squirrel Party is a glorious blend of superb one-liners and surprisingly clever innuendo and it's a real shame that this cannot be maintained consistently through to the end.

C Soco, 3 - 29 Aug, 7.55pm (8.45pm), £7.50 - £9.50, fpp154, tw rating 3/5 [s]

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Jessica Fostekew: Luxury Tramp

CKP

Racing through her set like a Buckfast-fuelled drunk, Jessica Fostekew doesn't stop for air, though she does to cup her breasts. In this clearly cathartic, almost hour long show – her first at this length – Fostekew details her time trying to please everyone, and how she realised this was impossible. As the title of her show suggests, she's obsessed with oxymorons, explaining that she is a woman who drinks champagne with kebabs, and wears special Chanel perfume with clothes from George at ASDA. Although at times it does feel like she is trying too hard, her natural charm more than makes up for it. 'Luxury Tramp' is a beautiful oxymoron, she says, and as a currently sober Irishman I'm inclined to agree.

Gilded Balloon Teviot, 3 – 28 Aug (not 16), 7.00pm (7.55pm), £8.00 - £9.50, fpp97. tw rating 4/5 [cd]

The Two Wrongies

The Two Wrongies begin their show hanging from a clothes rack, before stripping down to nipple tassels and playing duelling banjos on their overly bushy pubic wigs. Things continue in a similar vein, as the duo launch into a frenetic series of dance and mime routines, interspersed with surreal video clips to facilitate costume changes. They are frequently obscene, occasionally naked and always extremely funny. Both women are gifted physical performers who use every part of their bodies (and I mean EVERY part) to maximum comedic effect, and they're not afraid to push the boundaries of common decency up to and beyond the breaking point. They certainly won't be to everyone's tastes, but the best acts rarely are.

Assembly George Square, 3 - 28 Aug (not 15, 22), 10.30pm (11.30pm), £8.00 - £10.00, fpp162. tw rating 5/5 [im]

Zoe Lyons – Clownbusting

Mick Perrin For Just For Laughs Live

Zoe Lyons is about to turn 40, is back for a ninth year at the Fringe, and despairs that she lives in a world where people listen to advice given by Justin Bieber. Describing herself as an under-achiever that has never realised her full potential, she reveals that all she wants to do is curl up in her Snuggie and watch 'Come Dine With Me'. In her latest show, Lyons shares stories which range from meeting a Kate Bush fanclub at the top of a hill, to accidentally smuggling drugs (and a trouser press) over from Amsterdam. It's a hilarious show, full of spot-on observations, so bring your Snuggie and settle down for a ponder on the more absurd side of modern life.

Pleasance Courtyard, 3 – 28 Aug, 7.30pm (8.30pm), £9.00 - £12.00, fpp167. tw rating 4/5 [lam]

Vinegar Knickers: Sketchy Beast

Vinegar Knickers

This production sees a number of amusing sketches, interwoven with comical song and dance numbers, performed by a wannabe diva, a female Justin Bieber look-alike and a ginge. The show remained engaging from beginning to end, but as to their sense of humour... well, it's a matter of taste. Though I found them to be funny overall - especially in their mastery of every British accent I could think of - some moments did become excessively frenzied and, at times, dealt with the banal or base, bringing in unnecessary talk of vaginas and an overly blithe reference to Hitler. This shouldn't detract from the commendable acting, however, or the show's entertainment value in general, as it should go down very well with comedy fans.

C soco, 3-29 Aug (not 15), 4.35pm (5.25pm), £6.50 - £9.50, fpp163. tw rating 3 / 5 [ma]

This Is Soap

C Theatre

There isn't much of a set, and the costume changes come down to nothing more than the removal of a coat or putting on glasses but 'This Is Soap' by the C Theatre group, does perfectly well without these props. The cast are funny, charming and display great awkward chemistry, and Joseph Morpurgo in particular is staggeringly witty in every role he plays. The odd long pause and stiff jokes do occur, but my only real problem is that it's not longer - another 20 minutes would have been great. Almost entirely improvised, and full of audience interaction, this camp comedy will have you pleading for more. Even ending on a cliff-hanger, if 'This Is Soap' was a real series I might start watching TV again.

C Venues, 3 – 29 Aug, 1.15pm (2.05pm), £5.50 - £8.50, fpp157. tw rating 4/5 [cd]

DANCE AND PHYSICAL THEATRE

A World Without Words

Peters Productions In Association With The Old Red Lion Theatre.

Sometimes the simplest concepts can blow you away. The familiar story of boy-meets-girl is taken to another world through the choreography of Frances Teehan and this entirely dance-driven production. From tentative first meet to dramatic conclusion, a nine-strong cast dance a love story through beautifully constructed scenes that do not miss a beat. A traditional narrative is given first-rate treatment, pulling the audience in with an effortless display of skill. It is the sheer passion and wonderful ability, particularly from the two leads, Emma Cave and Richie

Wong, to communicate so much through body language and facial expression. No movement is wasted; every step is there for a reason. A simply beautiful piece of real physical theatre.

C, 6 – 20 Aug, 2.15pm, £5.50 - £9.50, fpp179. tw rating 5/5 [ep]

Flamenco! Flamenco!

Ricardo Garcia's Flamenco Flow

Ole! Music becomes dance and dance becomes music. Ricardo Garcia takes the audience on an intimate journey of emotion, passion and exceptional musical dexterity with supreme flamenco guitar, cajon, castanets and dance. Adding to the air of authenticity was the freak warmth of this particular Scottish evening, transporting us from Edinburgh to Andalusia, with the heat (and sweat) radiating from the stage with every move. The guitar is a central theme, pulling the entire piece together; whilst playing solo, Garcia's fingers are mesmerising, as though dancing around the strings. Particularly impressive are the synchronised dance sequences, exactly in time with the musical arrangement. Each movement produces sound, transforming dancer's bodies into instruments. The cast of three maintains striking energy levels throughout.

C eca, 3-29 Aug (not 15), 8.10pm (9:05pm), £5.50 - £11.50, fpp170. tw rating 4/5 [efs]

Images

Backhand Theatre In Association With C Theatre

Given the title, it's surprising how much of this collection of wistful vignettes plays out in total darkness. Setting out to explore the confusion of modern life through dance, monologue and circus, Backhand Theatre create an extremely sparse visual environment, relying on text - and the viewer's imagination - to fill in the blanks. Overly earnest dialogue is broken up by competent but mechanical movement, fragments of choreography and a little token trapeze work. A brief slideshow projection adds multimedia to the mix but it all feels unnecessary, underdeveloped or just unconnected. It's a shame, because when the two performers convey the loneliness and wonder they're looking for, there's a real spark. Ultimately, though, there's not much to see here.

C eca, 3 - 29 Aug (not 15), 4:30pm (5:10pm), £6.50 - £9.50, fpp172. tw rating 2/5 [df]

EVENTS

Free Daily Walks Down The Royal Mile

Edinburgh Festival Voluntary Guides Association

In the hectic world of the Edinburgh festival, the city itself often becomes only a series of 'most economical' routes between shows. The strength of these volunteer-run guided tours is that they allow you to view the Royal Mile at the sort of leisurely pace which the festival would otherwise not permit. While the tour could have benefited from more historical detail, especially considering its two hour duration, it was still a charming way to meander through the city absorbing genial nuggets of Edinburgh's history. While this tour is not for those with a keen passion for local civic history, it was still a very pleasant way to spend a sunny afternoon.

Cannonball House, Aug 2-29, times vary, free, fpp183. tw rating 3/5 [sj]

MUSIC

Pink Noise

FORK

With disco lights flashing and the haze machine on overdrive, FORK arrive on stage looking like Finland's Eurovision entry from 1986. They launch into a cappella cover versions, making the sounds of a full rock band with nothing more than their mouths. Their set list runs from Roxette to Lady Gaga via Madonna and Michael Jackson. It's all camper than a Freddie Mercury tribute act, and once the audience realise it's all completely ironic, they warm up and the show takes off. Featuring flawless vocals, this daft show is by turns hilarious and breath-taking. The highlights to watch out for are the Lionel Richie ballad, "Hello" and the medley of Heavy Metal classics. If only Eurovision was this much fun.

Assembly George Square, 3 – 28 August (not 10,17), 6.05pm (7.15pm), £11.00 - £15.00, fpp216. tw rating 4/5 [mc]

MUSICALS

Showchoir! The Musical

One Academy Productions

Entertainingly camp, but ultimately as shallow as the celebrity culture it mocks, 'Showchoir! The Musical' is fun but unfulfilling. Glitzy, joyful song and dance routines can be a bit screechy on the high notes but remain infectiously perky. The young, ensemble cast are generally good, with Victoria Fuller in particular excelling as a lovelorn Midwestern schoolmarm, and there's an excellent 'In The Back Row' number showcasing the supporting actors, although the leads themselves lack punch. Unfortunately the 'Behind the Façade' narrative device throttles any character development. Had the cast been allowed to explore their characters more and celebrity TV shows less, they would have fared much better. An enjoyable but unsatisfying hour of cheesy fluff.

C, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 17, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29 Aug, 12.00pm (1.00pm), £5.50 - £11.50, fpp233. tw rating 3/5 [ab]

You Want Me To Do What?!

Shriber Theatricals (New York)

Basing this show on her life experiences, Mary Lou Shriber describes her role, conflicts and dilemmas as a nurse through both speech and song. In this world debut performance, she conveys her emotions with ample passion and confidence, however, her best efforts at engaging the audience were mostly unsuccessful. This is meant to be a comedy musical, but there was no sign of laughter from an unresponsive and somewhat bored audience, while the ineffective lighting effects are at best odd and distracting. There are moments when Shriber's strong vocals genuinely bring the performance to life, but they are few and far between. Unless you have a strong preference for moody, contemplative content, go for something more light-hearted instead

C eca, 3 - 29 Aug (not 16), 3.15pm (4.10pm), £7.50 - £10.50, fpp235. tw rating 2/5 [cm]

THEATRE

Tis I, Shakespeare The Brit

Five One Productions

Beginning with the clichéd scene of a lonely, half-drunken writer sitting at his desk in despair, 'Tis I, Shakespeare the Brit' soon rouses itself from slumber with the very literal arrival of, naturally, Shakespeare. The bard comes knocking to enlist the help of the scholarly protagonist to help counter all the suspicions that he never actually wrote any of his own work. Plenty of comedy is generated by the chemistry between the bard and his sycophantic follower, although one or two jokes seem slightly shoe horned in, especially one concerning phone hacking. Whilst the ending is fairly inevitable, the witty exchanges make it unlikely you'll feel the need to sleep, perchance to dream, during this performance.

C eca, 4 - 29 Aug, 12.50pm (1:50pm), £6.50 - £9.50, fpp304. tw rating 3/5 [ljc]

'Tis In My Memory Locked: An Adaptation Of Hamlet

The Second Earth Theatre Company (USA)

Alas, poor Second Earth Theatre Company, who could not have chosen a more bitterly ironic title for this lacklustre and utterly forgettable reworking of Shakespeare's heartbreaking classic. Although the Dane was competently acted and suitably earnest throughout, any emotional response to his monologues was nullified by constantly distracting whirring from an unreliable and unnecessary film projector on the back row; the production would have been far less disjointed if Ophelia had appeared in the flesh rather than in stilted onscreen footage. As the only audience member in an amusingly hamlet-sized venue, I had expected an engaging and intimate forty minutes of theatre. However, the lead maintained only fleeting eye contact, alienating me during my own private performance – a crushing disappointment..

C eca, 3 – 29 Aug, 2.05pm (2.45pm), £6.50 - £9.50, fpp304. tw rating: 2/5 [jf]

The Toll

Savio(U)r Theatre Company (USA and UK)

What do you get when you cross frustrated toll collectors with rude customers on a Boston highway? A great recipe for an

inventive comedy based on true experiences on the American roads, strangely enough. We are introduced to an array of characters from all walks of life, from "Big" Tim, a closet gay with low self-esteem, intimidating drug dealer Dino who sells from his booth, to a series of obnoxious and downright eccentric drivers. The five-person cast does a fantastic job of recreating the fleeting, often abrupt, interactions of these people as they slow to a halt at the turnpike. It is the frenzy and communication failure that is so comical in this piece; this is an imaginative and superbly executed journey.

C soco, 3 – 29 Aug, 5.45pm (7pm), £6.50 - £9.50, fpp304. tw rating 4/5 [fm]

Vive Le Cabaret

Pleasance, Blonde Ambition And O'Conner Arts & Ents

"This year 'Vive le Cabaret' will be that little bit bigger, that little bit bolder, that little bit brighter, that little bit more beautiful," promises your charismatic host Des O'Connor, and 'Vive le Cabaret', already a leading light among Edinburgh Fringe shows, does not disappoint. From the glamorous dancers to the bizarre but undeniably talented Ray Guns Look Real Enough, from the hilarious Marcel Lucont (thinker, drinker) to the understated but surprising magic of Mat Ricardo the audience is kept engaged, titillated, laughing or gasping. My favourite act was, of course, Piff the Magic Dragon who combines pathos, humour and a small dog in his delightful magic act, but there was something for everyone in this line-up of talented people.

Pleasance Courtyard, 3 – 29 Aug (not 15, 22), 10.30pm (11.45pm), £10.00 - £12.00, fpp 309. tw rating 4/5 [rs]

Yellow Moon: The Ballad Of Leila And Lee

In Short Productions

"At last, we're in a story!" star-struck Leila poignantly sighs as she joins Lee through a sudden and ill-fated jerk into adulthood. This young cast deal maturely with touchy issues such as self-harm, murder and alcoholism with just the right sprinkling of comic relief. The smug, middle-class narration of Leila and Lee's story clashes uncomfortably with impressively authentic Scottish accents; but the small-budget atmosphere created with skilful lighting and brilliant live music make up for any awkwardness in the narration. The charmingly gritty Scottish highlands are evocatively portrayed, and the adept acting skills of the protagonists bring this play to an intensely heated and dangerous denouement. These young actors shine an intelligent light on the lives of today's youth.

C soco, 3 - 29 (not 16), 7.00pm (8.15pm), £7.50 - £10.50, fpp313. tw rating 4/5 [mm]

Look Back In Anger

SJC Productions

With its striking bedsit ideally sited in Soco's crumbling attic space, you can tell from the outset this production is paying attention to details. Staying faithful to Osborne's seminal play of economic recession and class repression, SJC avoid drawing attention to obvious modern-day parallels, allowing the text to speak for itself. The cast is subtle and engaging, building a claustrophobic atmosphere with fiery verbal exchanges and icy passivity. At the centre of it is Alistair Nordgate's Jimmy, pitched between savage misanthropy and desperate vulnerability. His menacing presence keeps the show energised, even if the pace slackens after the taut, tense opening. Though the material is more than fifty years old, this production remains fresh, powerful, political and relevant.

C Soco, 3 - 29 Aug (not 15), 7.10pm (8.15pm), £7.50 - £11.50, fpp276. tw rating 4/5 [df]



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(For Puck's Sake...)

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