



BARRY AND STUART

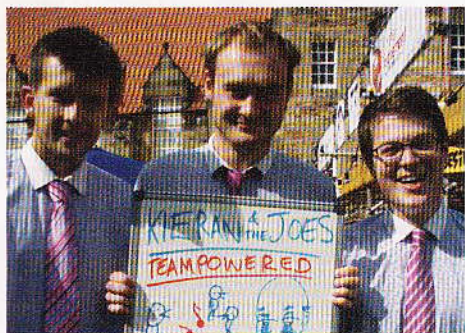
Showing and telling their magical mysteries ●●●●●

Be-suited Aberdonian purveyors of macabre magical comedy, Barry Jones and Stuart MacLeod have struck upon one hell of a gimmick. First comes *The Show*, filled with their favoured brand of slightly gory trickery and presented by the twosome with their usual genial hokey banter. In addition to escapology, mind-reading, plenty of card tricks and endangering a goldfish, there's some nice interactive stuff with Facebook and Twitter (keep your phone on). Viewing also requires wearing red tinted glasses (issued at the door) and the duo invite the audience to remove these spectacles at will if they want to have 'the truth' revealed.

Baz and Stu have levelled up in venue size and excel in their larger pond, turning out a series of quirky feats in a highly entertaining, if slightly insubstantial, hour that's lighter on the darkness than in previous years. But then comes *The Tell*. In a much more intimate venue next door, the boys risk exposing the secrets behind their tricks. It's less a dry re-hashing of earlier events and more a show in its own right. They reveal their props and techniques as well as few extra surprises. As suits the later hour, things take a turn for the sinister, none more so than footage of them as spotty, teenaged magic geeks.

While most magicians spend their time trying to prove their veracity, it's a change of pace to have Jones and MacLeod show off the hard work and learned skills that go into their act. Their respect for old-time magicians is palpable as they explain the history of certain tricks. Rather than coming across as a rude affront to the Magic Circle, they can't resist inviting the audience to marvel at the hidden beauty of their acts, proving the magic is in the details. (Suzanne Black)

■ Udderbelly's Pasture, 0844 545 8252, until 28 Aug, 10.15pm & midnight, £12-£14 (£11-£13) & £10-£12 (£9-£11).



KIERAN AND THE JOES

Teambuilding seminar with more laughs than cringes ●●●●●

Taking a cue from *Office*-style humour, which seeks to entertain with the toe-curlingly cringeworthy, Joe Markham, Joe Parham and Kieran Hodgson's show takes the form of a teambuilding seminar. From the inspirational music to matching pink ties, all signs point to an hour of trying to avoid the eyes of the performers and thus being chosen to participate in an awkward skit.

With Joe 1 in the lead, Joe 2 constantly trying to exert his authority and Kieran filling the role of work-experience do-it, things, predictably, go awry and Joe 1 loses his grip on proceedings. What could have been a tiresome hour of David Brent-type white collar horror is instead filled with a whole variety of gags.

While the participation aspect is actually fairly mild, on this particular day a lively audience contributes greatly to material that could have been undermined by a less willing crowd. By the end of the hour the boys do succeed in creating a bonded group: one whose aim is to fully invest in and enjoy the show. Surely that's a team worth building. (Suzanne Black)

■ The Store, 556 5375, until 28 Aug (not 16), 1.20pm, £8.50 (£7).



VINEGAR KNICKERS

A well-titled 'sketchy beast' ●●●●●

Sketchy just about sums this show up. Despite high-energy, enthusiastic performances from Samantha Baines, Katie Burnetts and Harriet Fisher, like a cheap chicken Caesar salad the meaty bits are too few and far between, and the 'lettuce' material is excessive enough to give the whole thing a limp and tedious feel.

The routines seesaw from protracted, predictable Catherine Tate-esque teen caricatures to more unexpected, innovative sketches, including a notably well-acted sketch about Adolf Hitler's unlikely old flame, where Burnetts marks herself out as the star of the show.

They're certainly a genuinely likeable trio, which makes the abundance of average jokes and gag-worthy London chav impersonations very frustrating, and their refreshingly unpretentious stage presence lends itself well to the sketch-genre.

Plus, the snippets of pleasant vocals suggest the ladies could sift away the bog-standard 'ginger jokes' and flesh out the less-hackneyed characterisation. (Rebecca Ross)

■ C soco, 0845 260 1234, until 29 Aug (not 15), 4.35pm, £7.50-£9.50 (£6.50-£8.50).



THE REAL MACGUFFINS

Sketch comedy verging on madness ●●●●●

From the preposterous dance that opens this impeccably smooth sketch show, there's a sense of fun and an appealing silliness to The Real MacGuffins that are hard to resist. They have the knack of being funny without doing much, so in a show as ably scripted and as tightly put together as this one, the laughs come thick and fast.

Entitled *Skitsophrenic*, a theme of madness vaguely binds things together, but the three guys can't stop themselves branching off, whether into a stomach-churning job interview or a truly disturbing impression of our beloved monarch. Things could probably do with some tightening up in the middle – a Christmas Carol-based routine goes on a bit too long – but it all comes together in a surprisingly moving operatic ending.

The threesome aren't afraid to leaven their sometimes clever humour with knob gags and crudity, but they do focus a little too much on gay sex and closet queens, themes that pall when you've seen them several times. Still, it's held together by superb deliveries, a sure sense of timing and a tremendous confidence. (David Kettle)

■ Pleasance Courtyard, 556 6550, until 29 Aug (not 16), 4.30pm, £9-£11 (£8-£9.50).

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Alistair Green ●●●● *Outpatient* retells Green's experience of having life-threatening kidney disease diagnosed, and is as hard to stomach as Henoch-Schönlein purpura is to pronounce. Not for the squeamish or hypochondriac, though 'technically interesting' with some entertaining riffs, it's like hospital food: well-meant but unfulfilling.

(Peggy Hughes) *The Caves*, 556 5375, until 28 Aug (not 17, 23), 4.35pm, £7-£8.

Amateur Transplants ●●●● The man who brought the world YouTube hit 'London Underground' has cobbled together a show which spreads the joke achingly thin; essentially a series of puns of varying success. Each is set to a re-jigged pop song, but veers between too obvious and uncomfortably risqué, and Adam Kay resorts to a reliance on toilet humour to win over the crowd.

(Kirstyn Smith) *Pleasance Courtyard*, 556 6550, until 29 Aug, 7pm, £10-£11.50 (£9-£10.50).

Andi Osho ●●●● Although potentially predictable subject matter to those familiar with her persona, Osho is as affable live as she appears on television. Self-deprecating with a sailor's mouth, she confidently breezes through an hour of female-focused comedy equally enjoyed by men in the audience. (Lauren Mayberry) *Pleasance Courtyard*, 556 6550, until 29 Aug (not 16), 6.40pm, £12-£14 (£10.50-£12.50).

Anil Desai ●●●● The comedian himself admits that this is a 'best of' show to celebrate his tenth Fringe, combining everything he enjoys most: stand-up, character comedy, impressions and music. He has an easy, likeable charm with a fantastic audience rapport, and there's a steady stream of jokes. It's just a shame that in seeming so eager to please, he doesn't try more challenging material. (David Kettle) *Gilded Balloon Teviot*, 622 6552, until 18 Aug, 7.45pm, £10-£12 (£9-£11).

Bob Downe ●●●● Celebrating his 20th Fringe anniversary, Aussie polyester sensation Downe presents his usual shtick of fine-voiced covers of popular song, high camp, face-pulling and silly dancing interspersed with DVD giveaways and quiz questions. It's a lively hour but one sadly without much substance and with only a handful of gags. For hardcore Downe fans only.

(Marissa Burgess) *Gilded Balloon Teviot*, 622 6552, until 29 Aug (not 16, 25), 8pm, £12-£14 (£10.50-£12.50).

Brett Goldstein ●●●● Stand-up Goldstein puts on his raconteur cap to narrate a tender coming-of-age tale. Set in a strip club. Softly spoken and exuding a quiet confidence he articulately and admirably wins over a small crowd. The material, though a little lacklustre, is elevated by his endearing personality and the lively finale is a tantalising glimpse at his potential. (Suzanne Black) *Pleasance Dome*, 556 6550, until 29 Aug (not 15), 5.30pm, £8.50-£9.50 (£7.50-£8.50).

Bring Me the Head of Adam Riches ●●●● Riches returns to the Fringe to perform as leading male in his own unique array of comedy skits. Regularly demanding the onstage assistance of uncomfortable audience members the show is not for the faint of

heart as he visibly thrives on a growing air of anxiousness, derived from his increasingly provocative onstage antics. (Jamie Cameron) *Pleasance Courtyard*, 556 6550, until 29 Aug, 4.45pm, £10-£11 (£8.50-£9.50).

Brown and Corley ●●●● This is like watching a bad school drama production - where if those involved aren't your offspring, you're not obliged to laugh. Brown is relentlessly abrasive, which makes Corley's blandness a comparative blessing. The best thing about it is the soundtrack punctuating the sketches and the fact the show ended 15 minutes before its hour was up.

(Rebecca Ross) *The Caves*, 556 5375, until 28 Aug (not 17), 7.25pm, £7.50 (£5).

Catriona Knox ●●●● The platter of characters here are, at best, well-acted and have the right foundations to be spun into entertaining sketches. However, the dialogue doesn't pack enough punch and the material quickly grates; that doesn't deter Knox, who even returns to the same insubstantial characters later on. It seems a waste of the sparkle that this young lady clearly has. (Rebecca Ross) *Udderbelly's Pasture*, 0844 545 8252, until 29 Aug (not 15), 1.35pm, £9-£10 (£8-£9).

Clare Plested ●●●● Ever wondered what Barbara Nice was like at 30? Clad in animal print and great shoes, the glam half of Fringe vets Plested and Brown tells the story of her Vegas wedding, aided by a big box of Pinot. It's touching, with some nicely observed impressions, and she's adorable, but the comedy is patchy: unusual from such an experienced performer. (Kirstin Innes) *Udderbelly*, 0844 545 8252, until 28 Aug (not 15), 5.20pm, £9-£10 (£8-£9).

Colin Hoult ●●●● Somewhere between *Angry Boys* and *The League of Gentlemen* lies Colin Hoult. A clearly talented and energetic performer, Hoult's bag is the grotesquery of the provinces. Crap Welsh poets, crime stoppers from East Midlands, gleeful northern dogs and fantasy enthusiasts people his hyperactive show. It's silly but not especially funny and the unrelenting use of the audience is exhausting. (Paul Dale) *Pleasance Courtyard*, 556 6550, until 29 Aug (not 16), 7.05pm, £12-£14 (£10.50-£12.50).

Colm O'Regan ●●●● When it comes to Ireland, what O'Regan does not discuss is not worth knowing. His social networking guide to Irish history and economics embraces themes like sandwich culture, national identity, Mills and Boon, skyscraper sexuality, Rapunzel's weight and legal concepts of comedy. It's funny, informative and resourceful. (Nicola Meighan) *Gilded Balloon Teviot*, 622 6552, until 29 Aug (not 16), 4pm, £8.50-£10 (£7.50-£8.50).

David Morgan ●●●● Subverting a popular football reference ('Running, Passing, Kicking') for the amateur dramatic variant ('Actor, Singer, Dancer'), Morgan goes heavy on musical theatre and high-camp tropes, which juxtapose with his accounts of childhood bullying and homophobia. The relentless jazz hands get a bit tiresome, but if *Les Mis* in-jokes float your boat then *Triple*

Threat is worth a look. (Nicola Meighan) *The Tron*, 556 5375, until 28 Aug (not 16), 2.20pm, £6 (£5).

Des Bishop ●●●● An ode to Bishop's late father, Mike, this should leave the most emotional tough-nut shaken and stirred, as Des tells the story of his dad's life, from stage actor, Ford model and 'almost Bond' to regular 'Queens, New York' dad. Walking the line between pathos and pity, this is largely funny, tender and acutely observed. (Anna Millar) *Pleasance Courtyard*, 556 6550, until 14 Aug, 9.10pm, £14 (£12.50).

Des Clarke ●●●● With jokes coming fast and a wit as sharp as a knife, Clarke will leave you in a good place. Illustrating the difference between Scots and the rest of the world, Clarke tirelessly delivers memorable zingers while keeping up a stream of hilarious patter, seemingly completely off the cuff. Locals and out-of-towners alike will love him. (Carmody Wilson) *Gilded Balloon Teviot*, 622 6552, until 29 Aug (not 17), 8.15pm, £12-£13 (£11-£12).

Dregs ●●●● Max Dickins and Mark Smith present an hour which thrives on its unpredictability, offering character-based sketches while maintaining a constant audience engagement. The show takes slightly too long to gather momentum after an awkward start, and would benefit from less shouting on occasion. However, the pair emerge as endearing and self-aware with a good deal of promising material. (Rebecca Ross) *Udderbelly*, 0844 545 8252, until 28 Aug (not 15), 9.30pm, £9-£10.50 (£8-£9.50).

Fear of a Brown Planet ●●●● Aamer Rahman and Nazeem Hussain both studied law back home in Australia but from what they say on stage, their parents are probably not best pleased with their ultimate career choice. They needn't worry though, as this pair are surely going places with their audience-friendly jovial banter about Islam, Michael Jackson and Barack Obama. (Brian Donaldson) *Gilded Balloon Teviot*, 622 6552, until 29 Aug (not 15, 22), 7.15pm, £8.50-£9.50 (£7.50-£8.50).

Fred MacAulay ●●●● With his particularly Scottish brand of stand-up, MacAulay returns for his 23rd Festival. By his own admission the majority of the audience was of a certain age, but all were charmed by tales of 'predominantly orange' airlines, a glance through Scottish papers and some cheeky audience banter. For some straightforward traditional stand-up, MacAulay's your man. (Suzanne Neilson) *The Stand III & IV*, 558 7272, until 17 Aug, 7.50pm, £10.

Guilt and Shame ●●●● After a hedonistic night, Robbie and Gabe just want to perform their Fringe show, but previous excesses keep showing up at the most inopportune moments. A moralistic drug dealer clamours to impart her added wisdom over sketches which get increasingly filthier and funnier until the only logical conclusion is either pornographic mime to Justin Bieber or a spot of murder. (Kirstyn Smith) *The Caves*, 556 5375, until 28 Aug (not 17), 10.15pm, £7-£8 (£6-£7).

Hal Sparks

●●●● Humankind's ongoing evolution from apes is the buff American stand-up's central thesis. En route to his conclusion that only the reintroduction of dinosaurs into the food chain will save us, Sparks blasts the crowd with a string of more commonplace observations. The material is occasionally a touch routine, but the delivery is impressively high velocity. (Miles Fielder) *Gilded Balloon Teviot*, 622 6552, until 28 Aug (not 15), 10.45pm, £9-£10 (£8-£9).

Indoor Fox Hunting ●●●● There are some lovely ideas to be found here, with several leaps of the imagination and a nicely absurd viewpoint. But stretched out across 50 minutes, the material wears very thin and a tightening up of both content and delivery is required. You suspect it's an overambitious venture at this point in Joe Munrow's promising career. (Marissa Burgess) *C aquila*, 0845 260 1234, until 29 Aug, 7.30pm, £7.50-£9.50 (£6.50-£8.50).

Jason Cook ●●●● Cook's latest frenzy of silliness is an exploration of happiness (as defined by Wikipedia), researched thoroughly by the comic and his dear old mum. The problem with a show that openly aims not to please everyone is that there's no challenge to the material; an hour spent in Cook's pleasant company offers little with any friction to make it memorable. (Niki Boyle) *Pleasance Dome*, 556 6550, until 29 Aug (not 17), 5.30pm, £12-£13 (£10.50-£12).

Jeff Leach ●●●● After a promisingly energetic opening, Leach lost momentum due to drunken heckling and had trouble getting the audience onside. His material, dealing mostly with emergent sexuality and humiliating experiences, is divisive and makes for uncomfortable tittering, rather than belly laughs. And he totally lost his crowd in a gross-out finale. (Carmody Wilson) *Pleasance Courtyard*, 556 6550, until 29 Aug (not 19-21), 11pm, £8-£9.50 (£7-£8.50).

Jessica Fostekew ●●●● Fostekew is a down-to-earth posh bird. *Luxury Tramp* pertains to the grotty habits which conflict with her plush background, such as eating a kebab washed down with Dom Pérignon. This is observational humour with a confessional edge. (Lauren Mayberry) *Gilded Balloon Teviot*, 622 6552, until 28 Aug (not 16), 7pm, £8-£9.50 (£7-£8.50).

Joel Dommett ●●●● Dining out on the retelling of one week spent in the company of an unnamed celebrity crush, Dommett weaves a charming and self-effacing love story. Behind the trendy haircut and gleeful grin is an assured performer with the skills to back up his confidence. Let's hope another crazy encounter comes along in time for his 2012 Fringe. (Suzanne Black) *Pleasance Dome*, 556 6550, until 29 Aug (not 16), 6.50pm, £9.50-£12 (£8-£10.50).

Joe Wilkinson ●●●● Bounding on stage with arms aloft, the loveable Wilkinson plays around with his front

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row for a bit before settling into the kind of underpowered affair you'd rightly be expecting having seen his work on BBC Three's *Him & Her* and onstage in *Two Episodes of MASH*. A Fringe oven is possibly not the ideal place to see a show about a guy who had really good parents who failed to screw him up and so failed to provide him with traumatic material for a career in comedy. The irony is not altogether lost. (Brian Donaldson) *Pleasance Courtyard*, 556 6550, until 28 Aug (not 17, 24), 5.45pm, £8.50-£9.50 (£7-£8).

John Robertson ●●●● Australian *Idol* reject Robertson has constructed a tightly-scripted monologue full of fascinating true stories. He wraps his infectiously toothy grin around an autobiographical tale festooned with convoluted gags and dreamlike meanderings. The surreal asides are so tightly interwoven that sometimes it's difficult to separate fact from fiction although it all fits into his philosophy that 'nothing means anything'.

(Murray Robertson) *Assembly Hall*, 623 3030, until 29 Aug, 10.30pm, £9 (£8).

Lady Garden ●●●● Opening with a lovely scene which links hen nights to war movies, the LG quintet offers up a series of standalone and recurring sketches (best of those being the woman whose life keeps falling apart, the least successful being the tattoo parlour scenes). There's a subtle switch in mood for the second half and the finale will be either a treat or a torment depending on your viewpoint. (Brian Donaldson)

Pleasance Courtyard, 556 6550, until 29 Aug (not 16), 6pm, £8.50-£9.50 (£7-£8).

The Life Doctor ●●●● Written by Adam Lawrence and Phil Wang, Lawrence channels the most irksome of TV lifestyle gurus. The premise quickly falls flat as jokes fail to land or are utterly baffling. A stand-out turn by George Potts and some surprisingly witty pre-recorded video skits can't save this disappointment as it stumbles towards a fittingly pessimistic ending.

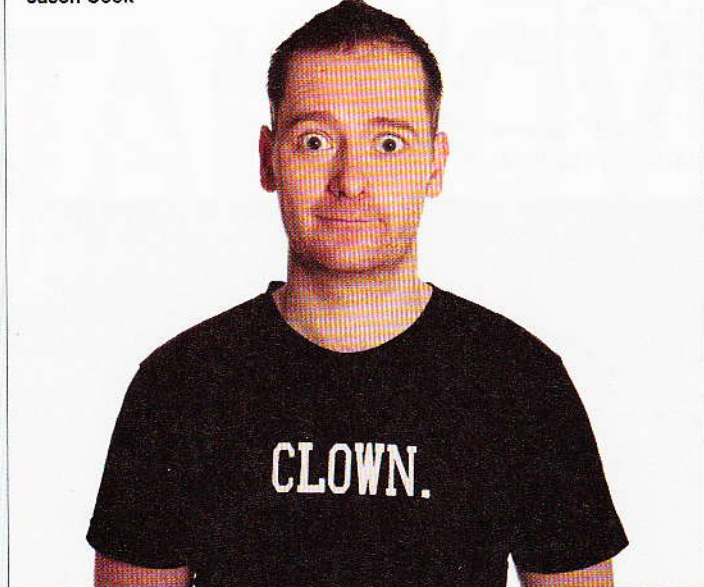
(Suzanne Black) *Underbelly*, 0844 545 8252, until 28 Aug (not 17), 8.10pm, £9-£10.50 (£8-£9.50).

Matt Rudge ●●●● While he's the sort of nice, respectable boy you might take home to meet your mother, Rudge isn't lighting any fires in this lolling show, which features meandering dialogue and humour with little spark. The routine seems a bit too earnestly practised, lacking fluidity or flair, though Rudge's natural warmth does keep the whole thing afloat. (Rebecca Ross)

Pleasance Courtyard, 556 6550, until 29 Aug (not 17), 7.15pm, £11-£12 (£9.50-£11).

Nathan Caton ●●●● Likeable but palpably nervous, Caton's material shows promise. Observations on his eccentric grandmother and the questionable lyrics of Tinie Tempah are tentative but there are glimmers of brilliance. With an audience willing him on, the show may well gain momentum over the coming weeks. A title that reflects the two ways a stand-up career could go, will Caton *Get Rich or Die Cryin'?* (Suzanne Neilson) *Pleasance Courtyard*, 556 6550, until 29 Aug (not 16), 8.15pm, £9.50-£12 (£8-£10.50).

Jason Cook



Pete Firman ●●●● This comic magician takes his tricks seriously. From the opening escape out of a locked box through various sleight-of-hand illusions to the climactic guillotining of an audience member, Firman proves himself to be a very capable conjurer. But he also embellishes and undercuts his magic routines with an enjoyable line in potty-mouthed sarcasm. (Miles Fielder) *Pleasance Dome*, 556 6550, until 28 Aug, 8.30pm, £12-£14 (£10.50-£12.50).

Pope Benedict: Bond Villain

●●●● He's already tackled *Jesus: The Guantanamo Years* and toured with *Eco-Friendly Jihad*, and this year Abie Philbin Bowman is still looking at the bigger political landscape with a provocative and brilliantly witty hour drawing parallels between religion and the worldwide economic meltdown. This is another show of the kind of intelligent, common sense approach we've come to expect from APB. (Marissa Burgess) *Pleasance Courtyard*, 556 6550, until 29 Aug (not 16), 8.45pm, £8.50-£9.50 (£7.50-£8.50).

Rayguns Look Real Enough

●●●● *Glee* fans are well catered for in this mash-up of thematically-arranged medleys, but the laughs come thin and slow. Frontman Ray Gun is an emphatic performer, tucking into lead vocals with relish, but his cat costume is a gimmick that long outstays its welcome, existing only to serve a laboured set of puns. (Murray Robertson) *Assembly George Square*, 623 3030, until 29 Aug, 6.40pm, £9.50-£10.50 (£8.50-£9.50).

Ray Time in the Daytime ●●●●

Second-rate daytime TV presenter Ray Green - a loveable yet disturbing creation of comic Dave Gibson - sits halfway between Partridge and Brent. He's stronger in his unscripted banter than he is in the internet TV show he attempts to pull off in this rough and ready hour. Great facial expressions, impeccable timing, but some of the humour is too easy. (David Kettle) *Gilded Balloon Teviot*, 622 6552, until 28 Aug (not 15), 2.30pm, £8.50-£9.50 (£7.50-£8.50).

Ro Campbell ●●●● In this marginally bitter show, the current

Scottish Comedian of the Year and full-on Aussie tells the story of his intriguing background as a retort to those who loudly jeered his victory. There's some nice stuff about the 'true' roots of Kevin Bridges and an amusing bit about the venue, but it's all a bit limp with his tale containing few genuine laughs.

(Brian Donaldson) *Stand III & IV*, 558 7272, until 28 Aug (not 15), 10.35pm, £8 (£7).

Run, Deaf Boy, Run! ●●●●

Finding himself in his late 40s, deaf comedian Steve Day was feeling like he was falling apart at the seams, so he responded by deciding to run the London Marathon. Despite the fact that the only thing that defined him as a runner was that he owned a pair of trainers. An engaging, heart-warming tale told with skill. (Marissa Burgess) *The Stand II*, 558 7272, until 28 Aug (not 15), 1.10pm, £8 (£7).

Sex You (I'm Gonna) ●●●● Like

the 'grower, not show-er penis' that Nathan Phillips tells us about, this act sells itself short, proving mercifully more sophisticated than it advertises itself to be; in fact, he's quite the gentleman. The inescapable problem is that it doesn't work without an audience willing to participate, and when they don't, it reveals a flimsy side to Phillips' repartee. (Rebecca Ross) *The Store*, 556 5375, until 14 Aug, 9pm, £7-£9.

Stuart Goldsmith ●●●● Our affable host is one of life's nice guys: he likes to help. Whether appeasing young godson Tom with some robot dancing or dealing with life's many anxieties, Goldsmith's (trying to be) your man in a crisis. A pleasant romp, amusingly delivered, this is easy, assured comedy. (Anna Millar) *Pleasance Courtyard*, 556 6550, until 28 Aug (not 17), 7pm, £9-£10 (£7.50-£9).

Suitcase Royale ●●●● Some late-night, top-notch junkyard theatre from this trio of talented Aussies, as our hapless heroes fight to save their caravan park from an invasion of zombie wombats. Cue a chaotic hour of blues music, B-list horror schlock and high-energy slapstick, as cardboard caravans, over-sized fur suits and crumple-filled

bazookas transport us to a world of nonsensical make-believe. (Anna Millar) *Pleasance Courtyard*, 556 6550, until 28 Aug (not 16), 11.10pm, £10 (£9).

Tim Clare ●●●● A frequently inventive follow-up to last year's excellent debut from Clare, *How to Be a Leader* is a handy guide to anyone who wants to rule over people and land. After drawing links between suicide cultist Jim Jones and chocoholic Willy Wonka, he closes with a rousing series of raps about iconic women who have led the way. Another wonderful chance to boo at Thatcher. (Brian Donaldson) *Underbelly*, 0844 545 8252, until 28 Aug (not 15), 8.55pm, £9-£10 (£8-£9).

Tom Price ●●●● *Torchwood* actor Price spins a scattershot, shaggy yarn from the schoolyard to Billie Piper. From the off, he's ebullient and thoroughly engaging, delicately interweaving material about his disabled mum that absolutely drips with warmth while still being deliciously funny. Striking a fine balance between confidence and modesty, his hilarious middle-class ruminations are a joy to behold.

(Murray Robertson) *Pleasance Courtyard*, 556 6550, until 28 Aug (not 16), 9.45pm, £9.50-£12 (£8-£10.50).

Tom Stade ●●●● Gripping the mic, MC-style, Stade is a salty Everyman. Saying what no one else dares say and with much better timing, he's the buddy your wife fancies but doesn't want around. There are a few misses, but gags about marriage, famine and national pride are good targets, and his naked whimsy coupled with shock humour make for easy, if not entirely guilt-free, laughs. (Carmody Wilson) *Pleasance Courtyard*, 556 6550, until 28 Aug (not 15), 9pm, £10.50-£12 (£9-£10.50).

Tony Law ●●●● It's noon and Tony Law bursts on stage bedecked in the get-up of a 19th century Arctic explorer. If you're not fully awake, you will be soon. The next hour is a surrealist joyride through a dangerous world. His delivery is brash, loud and joyously raucous. Confident and bizarre, Law's act will go way out there taking you with him. (Suzanne Neilson) *The Stand II*, 558 7272, until 28 Aug (not 15, 21), noon, £8 (£7).

Totally Tom ●●●● Straight out the trap, Toms Palmer and Stourton launch into a run of standalone sketches. With great versatility they eschew running gags and call-backs; each sketch is a snapshot of a fully realised world which displays their impressive range of comedic prowess and accents. A few of the later skits lack punch but the overall hit rate is high. (Suzanne Black) *Underbelly*, 0844 545 8252, until 28 Aug (not 15), 3.45pm, £8.50-£10 (£7.50-£9).

Zeus' Pamphlet ●●●● This five-piece sketch troupe isn't bringing anything spectacularly new to the genre but nevertheless it's an enjoyable show that's worth seeing. Where some characters are familiar - made girls on the back of a bus - there are a few ideas that are more inventive, in particular the backstage CCTV that cuts in between skits. (Marissa Burgess) *Underbelly*, 0844 545 8252, until 28 Aug (not 16), 2.40pm, £8-£9.50 (£7-£8.50).



THIRSTY

Powerful physical evocation of the relationship between women and alcohol ●●●●●

In a bathroom, on a hen night, two boozed-up young women dance, shriek and hector the audience, the epitome of Booze Britain. In one of the three toilet cubicles Shane Durrant sits astride the porcelain throne surrounded by music-making accoutrements. To his musical score Jemma (McDonnell) and Kylie (Walsh) introduce their project: to tell the stories of women who drink.

With drinking stories collected from a blog and questionnaire and drunken ramblings culled from a hotline the duo weaves verbatim extracts with the story of their friendship, measured by the bottle. As the action moves from flat to pub to club to taxi rank Durrant sets the scene sonically, adding moments of humour without stealing focus. Fiammetta Horvat's set evolves into playful versatility.

Leeds company The Paper Birds are known for the dynamic movement of their work and, as expected, McDonnell and Walsh inhabit all the women they portray with a full-blown physicality. Combined with adroit prop work a red patent show becomes an emblem of a whole tract of society, a glass becomes a talisman, a party dress both uniform and armour.

While the cast purport to only be interested in showing the highs of drinking, the flipside of blackouts, poor decision-making, hangovers and regret spills in. This is when their movement capabilities really begin to shine. Scrolling through the postures and actions of sobriety, drunkenness and dizzying sickness, they express a whole night's agonies and ecstasies. While dealing with a topic that obliterates the senses they tell the stories of those who can barely speak, perform the dances of those who can barely stand. Without preaching or demonising, *Thirsty* engages with its subject with vitality, warmth and humour to create a powerful piece of physical theatre. (Suzanne Black)

■ Pleasance Courtyard, 556 6550, until 28 Aug (not 15), 5.45pm, £10-£11 (£9-£10).



ALMA MATER

Immersive, lovely look at childhood innocence and loss ●●●●●

There's been so much recent chatter about the use of digital technology in theatre that you can practically hear the inevitable Luddite backlash grinding up already: don't let 'em drown out this tiny, beautiful ghost story. Using – at face value – just an iPad and a small white room, Glasgow company Fish and Game have managed to create a wholly new theatrical experience.

The solo audience member treats the iPad like a camera, matching the corners and doorknobs up to a film shot in apparently the same tiny space. Through the screen, the room becomes a little girl's bedroom, and as she directs the user wordlessly about, the terrors and joys of her imagination spool out around you. She feels real; she's right there, sitting beside you on her bed, and the film's slick, horror movie-editing plays on this feeling to crank up the tension. It's an utterly immersive and ultimately lovely look at childhood loneliness and loss, but the delicate, haunted worlds she drags you through are occasionally so unsettling you can feel them on your skin. Ball's in your court, Microsoft. (Kirstin Innes)
■ St George's West, 225 7001, until 29 Aug (not 15), every 15th minutes from 11am-6.50pm, £5.

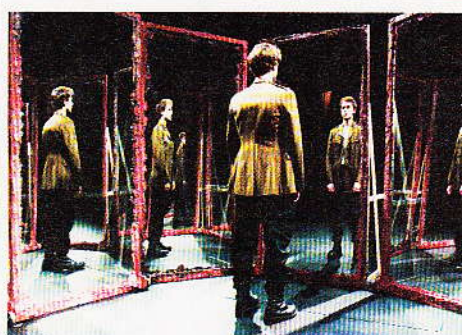


A CELEBRATION OF HAROLD PINTER

Pinter wonderland survives the hype ●●●●●

The danger that accompanies any theatre event accompanied by movie star hype is that the piece itself becomes lost under the brouhaha surrounding its presenters. With John Malkovich directing Julian Sands for this piece, that was always the danger, but given the low-key nature of the project, there was bound to be a certain sinkage beneath the weight of the stars.

Still, an appropriately healthy crowd was attracted to this retrospective of the poetry of the late, great pause-meister. Sands engages in anecdotes about his experience of Pinter, whom he found alternately fascinating and intimidating, goes on to explain the playwright's own take on the subtle variations and meanings of his celebrated silences and throughout reads many extracts from Pinter's much underrated poetry. It seems surprising, though, that early poetry about love, cricket and the human condition is favoured over the poetry of political anger that Pinter increasingly favoured. This latter period is given rather short shrift, but the piece as a whole does fairly well what it claims to do. (Steve Cramer)
■ Pleasance Courtyard, 556 6550, until 21 Aug, 3pm, £12.50-£15 (£11.50-£14).



THE CURSE OF MACBETH

Great staging, shame about the acting ●●●●●

From the knife-wielding thugs that welcome you into the venue, it's clear that this production of *Macbeth* is going to be in your face. And in those terms the show doesn't disappoint. Its striking design – all bloodstained mirrors and dry ice – matches the sepulchral Baroque glory of the venue itself. The leather- and bondage-influenced costumes and visceral sound design only help to define a production that's dark, physical and aggressive.

If only this sumptuous staging were matched by the content. Shakespeare's original has been rather hacked about in reducing it to just over an hour in length – and in any case, words are often lost behind the set's towering mirrored panels. The acting is variable: Guy Woolf is a petulant Macbeth (it's hard to believe he really has designs on the crown), there's a passionate yet fragile Lady Macbeth from Eve Hedderwick-Turner, and Jack Hudson delivers a strong Macduff, full of impotent rage on discovering the death of his family. If the effort devoted to the staging had been applied to the delivery, this could have been a winner. (David Kettle)
■ The Playhouse at Hawke and Hunter Green Room, 0844 871 3014, until 29 Aug (not 15), 4pm, £10.50 (£9.50).

Alice in Wonderland and Other Adventures With Lewis Carroll

●●●● Actor Richard Smithies looks 'surprisingly like' Lewis Carroll says the Fringe catalogue – unfortunately, this is where the positives end. The songs are badly sung to midi backing tracks, the costume ill-fitting, the delivery stilted and crucial episodes in the *Alice* saga are skipped over entirely. The sole infant attending the same performance as *The List* slept through the latter half – a wise move on her part. (Niki Boyle) *New Town Theatre*, 220 0143, until 28 Aug (not 16), 11.30am, £7–£8 (£5–£6).

At The Sans Hotel ●●●● Being invited to 'come feel from the front' of the stage is indicative of a bohemian love-in, but *At the Sans Hotel* is instead a sophisticated exploration of the form/content dichotomy. The play balances large ideas of perceived reality with humour and charisma and references to Sontag's German tourist, the dramatic arc and lack of a 'resolution' all make this play a very intelligent and thoroughly self-relexive performance. (Tammy Le Vasan)

Assembly Hall, 623 3000, until 28 Aug (not 15), 7.20pm, £10–£11 (£9–£10).

Belt Up's The Boy James ●●●● *The Boy James*, loosely based on the childhood of JM Barrie, begins with childish enthusiasm but gradually moves into more sinister ground, and ends with no firm resolution. Although the acting and script occasionally falter, the effect is one of well-constructed and well-executed drama. *James* doesn't reach the highs of some of Belt Up's earlier Fringe successes, but it's a worthwhile addition to their canon. (Niki Boyle) *C Soco*, 0845 260 1234, until 29 Aug, 10.50pm, £10.50–£12.50 (£8.50–£10.50).

The Billie Holiday Story ●●●● Under the pretence of a gig, actress Nina Kristofferson uses the 'stage patter' sections of the show to provide narrative about the singer's tragic life, whilst nailing down Holiday's voice and mannerisms. Enjoyable insight into a unique talent, plagued by men, drugs, racism and the law. (Lauren Mayberry) *Assembly George Square*, 623 3030, until 14 Aug, 5.45pm, £14 (£13).

The Dipper ●●●● What should have been the sting in *The Dipper's* tail is inexplicably revealed in one of the very first moves anyone makes in this show, rendering the next 40 minutes pointless. A convoluted set-up results in a well-to-do housewife cum jewel thief befriending her maid's convict sister. Utter nonsense ensues and the sudden ending misses the mark completely. (Kirstyn Smith) *Laughing Horse @ The Newsroom*, 557 5830, until 12 Aug, 4pm, free.

Dream Pill ●●●● Based on real experiences, this minimalist performance focuses on two young girls trafficked from Nigeria. The two actresses adopt child-like language and mannerisms to provide a poignant insight into the unsettling reality of sex work in the UK. (Lauren Mayberry) *Underbelly Cowgate*, 0844 545 8252, until 28 Aug (not 15), 4.05pm, £8–£9 (£7–£8).

Dr Apple's Last Lecture ●●●● Depicting a drug trip live on stage was always going to be challenge. But in this

tale of an uptight psychology professor deciding to expand his consciousness, the end result is self-indulgent rather than revelatory. Many of the play's images are striking, and the acting is energetic, but ultimately you're left wondering what point it's trying to make. (David Kettle) *Gilded Balloon Teviot*, 622 6552, until 28 Aug, 2.30pm, £9–£10 (£8–£9).

Generation 9/11: So Far / So Close ●●●● Don't let the subject put you off. This is a captivating and quietly profound one-man show by San Franciscan Chris Wolfe that refracts 9/11 through the memories of ordinary people, right up to the present day. He's a charismatic performer, and his characterisation is strong and bold, yet finely etched. At times the show is shocking, at others funny, and Wolfe isn't afraid to challenge his audience's preconceptions. (David Kettle) *theSpaces @ Surgeons Hall*, 0845 508 8515, until 27 Aug (not 14, 21), 1.05pm, £7 (£6).

Life Still ●●●● A wordless piece of dystopian object theatre, worth seeing for the incredible technical skill on show alone. The two performers bring life to the most obscure and simple objects, creating mesmeric images of intriguing originality. Abstract and sometimes just a little too po-faced, the show disturbs and disorients with a series of strange vignettes that evoke a post-apocalyptic world. (Laura Ennor) *Pleasance Courtyard*, 556 6550, until 29 Aug (not 16, 25), 3.40pm, £9–£10 (£8–£9).

The Magical Faraway Tree

●●●● If you're looking for a family-friendly rendering of an Enid Blyton tale, beware – this isn't it. Instead, the supremely silly boys of *Sleeping Trees Theatre* have concocted a multi-character comedy with only the slenderest of roots lodged in Blytonian soil. The pacing is frantic, the actors quick-witted and the language occasionally profane – and so much the better for it. (Niki Boyle) *Just The Tonic at the Caves*, 556 5375, until Sun 28 (not 17), 1pm, £4 (£3).

Minute After Midday ●●●● Pared-down performances resonate here as three very different stories are told, in overlapping monologues, from the day the Omagh bombing devastated Ireland. A young survivor, a widow, and the driver who left the car bomb on Lower Market Street, relive the moments before and after the attack, to poignant effect. (Anna Millar) *Gilded Balloon Teviot*, 622 6552, until 29 Aug (not 16), 1.30pm, £8.50–£9.50 (£7.50–£8.50).

Nobody's Home: A Modern Odyssey ●●●● Confined to his bathroom (and his own mind), returning soldier Grant battles war-born demons, which parallel the perils faced by Ulysses, tussling with wife Penny (who doubles as Homer's monsters) for firm mental ground. Excellently devised and performed by Dorie Kinnear and Will Pinchin, this is a powerful portrayal of mental illness, by turns shockingly funny and devastatingly moving, and always compelling. (Suzanne Black) *Gilded Balloon Teviot*, 622 6552, until 29 Aug (not 16, 23), 1.15pm, £9–£10 (£8–£9).

The Oh Fuck Moment ●●●● We're ushered into a boardroom where two performers join us in discussing

horrifying human errors, from the embarrassingly rude, through the sexually ill-fated, and on to the physically terminal. This is an uneasily entertaining afternoon of reflection on human frailty that teaches us not to beat ourselves up too much, and no doubt provokes further anecdotes afterwards from an audience who are encouraged to fess up to their social toe-curlers. (Steve Cramer) *St George's West*, 225 7001, until 29 Aug (not 17, 24), £10 (£8).

One Night Stan ●●●● This excellent one-man show written and performed by Miles Gallant dramatises the life of Stanley Jefferson aka Stan Laurel of. With his partner taken ill on the penultimate week of their 1954 UK tour, Stan looks back on his career, from its beginnings in a Glasgow variety hall through his move to America to make movies with Ollie and back to the variety circuit again. Highly informative and beautifully performed, it's a funny-sad showcase for one half of the greatest comedy duo ever. (Miles Fielder) *Assembly George Square*, 623 3030, until 29 Aug, 3.45pm, £11–£12 (£9–£10).

One Under ●●●● This energetic piece of devised theatre looks beneath the sweat and stress of the cramped carriages to unearth the inner lives of people travelling on the London Underground. Their stories are variously poetic and passionate, and although the fellow travellers remain distant from one another, there's a final moment of connection that provides light at the end of tunnel. (Miles Fielder) *Pleasance Courtyard*, 556 6550, until 29 Aug (not 15, 23), 12.45pm, £7.50–£8.50 (£6–£7).

Radio Deluxembourg ●●●● A parodic retro-kitsch adventure in which a sibling pop duo are kidnapped by an evil alien overlord and forced to perform radio plays on his intergalactic frequency *could* work, but here it doesn't. The cast of four look weary and barely in on the joke, but the main culprit is an utterly unfunny script. (Laura Ennor) *Spotlites @ The Merchants' Hall*, 220 5911, until 29 Aug, 7.40pm, £9.50 (£8.50).

Remembering Annabel ●●●● Riding high on the critical success of their 2010 show *Pale Moon*, the young members of *Cathartic Connections* chose to adapt Edgar Allan Poe's *Annabel Lee* as their follow-up. While there are clever flashes of humour, much of the plotting feels messy and unfocused, and the acting lacks subtlety. There's a great show in the company, but this unfortunately isn't it. (Niki Boyle) *theSpaces on North Bridge*, 0845 557 6308, until 13 Aug, 3.05pm, £7.50 (£5).

Roar ●●●● If you want your 'sexy romp' boxes ticked, this is the place to do it. *Dumbshow's Roar* is a stylish, exuberant tale of gin-soaked 17th-century wenches led by a 'Moll Cutpurse' channelling Beyoncé in full-on she-lion mode. Bawdy, colourful and self-consciously anachronistic in their deployment of everything from *Wild Beasts* to a joke about David Cameron, they create a show that is frequently hilarious but not without emotion. (Laura Ennor) *C Chambers Street*, 0845 260 1234, until 29 Aug (not 16), 8.45pm, £9.50–£11.50 (£7.50–£9.50).

The Seagull Effect ●●●● It's raining on the way to *Idle Motion's The Seagull Effect*, setting the audience up to appreciate a play about small but consequential events in the world and the weather. Unfortunately the performance is similarly damp with overly literal metaphors and unnecessarily dramatic score and direction. However, the experience is elevated by the enthusiasm of the players and some clever visual techniques. (Tammy Le Vasan)

Zoo Roxy, 662 6892, until 27 Aug (not 16, 23), 4.20pm, £10 (£8).

Shhh: The Musical ●●●● There is little doubting the enthusiasm of this young cast, as they do their best with a 'romcom' script about finding love in a bookshop. Sadly their energy is largely wasted on a script lacking in originality and punch. The characters are roundly unlikeable, side stories are left hanging and the songs are totally forgettable. *Shhh* just about covers it. (Anna Millar) *theSpaces @ Venue 45*, 0845 508 8387, until 13 Aug, 8.10pm, £7 (£6).

Sideshow ●●●● Surrounded by the paraphernalia of the freakshow, Robert Ingham (Lewis Davidson) reminisces on his life as an oddity and the world behind the velvet curtain. Switching between biography and sideshow acts, Davidson's one-man show plays out like the pitch of a long-winded Coney Island barker, with the only levity coming from a brief trapeze interlude. There's an awful lot of build up for very little pay-off. (Suzanne Black) *C ECA*, 0845 260 1234, until 29 Aug (not 15), 3.20pm, £7.50–£9.50 (£6.50–£7.50).

Slavery to Star Trek ●●●● Andreea Kindryd has lived a fascinating life. She knew Martin Luther King, was friends with Malcolm X and worked on the original *Star Trek* series. She's an engaging storyteller whose tale starts in the days of her great grandparents and slavery, progresses through the civil rights movement of the 60s before finding work at Lucille Ball's production company. The ending feels rushed but only because you get the feeling there are so many stories left untold. (Henry Northmore) *C ECA*, 0845 260 1234, until 29 Aug (not 16), 4.20pm, £7.50–£9.50 (£6.50–£8.50).

Terezin: Children of the Holocaust ●●●● Writer Anna Smulowitz, who lost relatives in the Holocaust, presents a fictionalised account of a concert performed at Czech concentration camp Terezin. Using a revolving cast of youngsters to portray the daily suffering of camp internees the piece struggles and ultimately fails to convey the emotional weight of an unspeakable atrocity. (Suzanne Black) *theSpaces on the Mile*, 0845 508 8316, until 20 Aug (not 14), 1.40pm, £8 (£6).

Toulouse-Lautrec: The Musical ●●●● Toulouse Lautrec's life was a colourful one, worthy of musical exploration, and this Japanese company's dedication is admirable, in a one-man show, helmed by performer Jun Sawaki. But while he gives his all to the piece, it lacks the pace and musical gravitas to make it truly memorable. (Anna Millar) *C Aquila*, 0845 260 1234, until 29 Aug, 4.10pm, £9.50–£10.50 (£8.50–£9.50).

And the Birds Fell from the Sky

●●●● Don a pair of video goggles, put headphones in your ears and surrender yourself to the bizarre Faruk clowns in this short immersive experience, where you're the main protagonist. Production values are high, and the performers make every effort to ensure your senses are engaged. At once seductive, bewildering and threatening, it makes real life seem mundanely afterwards. (David Kettle) *C ECA*, 0845 260 1234, until 29 Aug, every 15 minutes from noon-2pm, 4-6pm, 8-10pm, £8.50-£10.50 (£7.50-£9.50).

Bette and Joan – The Final Curtain

●●●● It's 1989 and Bette Davis lies alone and dying. Her nemesis Joan Crawford arrives to guide her to the other side, and then the fireworks begin. Foursight Theatre's witty and inventive deconstruction of the relationship between two of Hollywood's most iconic actresses (and later battleaxes) is well researched, sharp, irreverent and very moving. (Paul Dale) *Assembly George Square*, 623 3030, until 29 Jun, £12-£13 (£11-£12).

Constantinople ●●●● Theatre Beating's dramatisation of the rise and fall of Constantinople is like a great pop song; it thrives on the tension between being completely brilliant and also very, very stupid. The jokes are from the daft end of the street, but the physical skill, commitment, affability and sound research of the Kiwi performers give the show unlikely wings. Wisely silly, ridiculously funny and unexpectedly educational. (Alex Johnston) *Electric Circus*, 226 4224, until 29 Aug, 3pm or 10.30pm, free.

Cul-De-Sac ●●●● Scripted by Matthew Osborn, this natty little three-hander relocates *The 'burbs* to Middle England. Taking the tested trope of a seeming idyll masking a sinister reality, the deviant Tony Deveraux rules the cul-de-sac with an iron conservatism, where 'wrong-uns' are not welcome. A capable garden-fence comedy about the perils of conformity. (Suzanne Black) *Pleasance Courtyard*, 556 6550, until 28 Aug, 3.15pm, £10 (£8).

Dan Canham: 30 Cecil Street

●●●● Canham tells the story of a now dilapidated theatre in Ireland through movement, set to a soundtrack of voices and ambient noise. An unusual piece of dance-theatre with a surprising amount of humour, even if the recordings are at times difficult to decipher.

(Lauren Mayberry) *Forest Café, forest fringe.co.uk*, until 27 Aug, 9.30pm, free.

Devotion ●●●● Insofar as it attempts to convey the depth of feeling engendered by the traditions and solemn ceremony of the bullfight, *Devotion* just about succeeds, powered by two stunningly intense performances from its male leads. However its story is too slight and its early stated aims to uncover the nature of the *torero* only partially met and too flippantly glossed, for it to leave any lasting effect. (Laura Ennor)

theSpaces @ Surgeons Hall, 0845 508 8515, until 27 Aug, 7.20pm, £10 (£8).

Doris Day Can Fk Off**

●●●● The concept for Greg McLaren's show should certainly be applauded: for a number of weeks he went round the UK

communicating to people through song, taping his experience as he went.

Accompanied by a sound deck, guitar and gold lame jacket, this is the story of that experiment. Inspired and thought-provoking, McLaren's show rises and falls on his interaction with an audience who are amused, bemused and embarrassed in equal measure.

(Anna Millar) *Zoo Southside*, 662 6892, until 29 Aug, 6.15pm, £9 (£7).

Hedda Gabler ●●●● A boldly minimal, variably acted and oddly updated adaptation of Ibsen's drama from the young actors of Palindrome Theatre Company of Austin, Texas. One of the Norwegian Bard's characters will, we are told, 'piss his pants', another is 'a piece of shit'; textual alterations which are incongruous in an otherwise classically-oriented production. Robin Grace Thompson gives a resonating performance in the title role.

(Mark Brown) *Hill Street Theatre*, 226 6522, until 29 Aug, 2.15pm, £8 (£6).

Hotel Methuselah ●●●● In a war-time hotel night porter Harry delves into his memories in this tense, mysterious multimedia work from *Imitating the Dog*. A frame around the stage offers limited views of the actors who work in tandem with pre-filmed dialogue and supplementary images to great effect. Playful, inventive and entrancing throughout, ITD's tricks are intrinsic, always working to enhance the story. (Suzanne Black) *Summerhall*, 226 0000, until 28 Aug, 10.45am, 12.45pm & 2.45pm, £12 (£10).

Little Matter ●●●● In their delightful purpose-built gypsy caravan/venue the River People weave a story of hope and despair using puppetry and song. The performers overflow with wit and charm, interacting with each other and the puppets comfortably. While the storyline doesn't knit together as much as it could – certain narrative threads feel under-explored – it's a beautiful show that's unafraid of a little darkness. (Niki Boyle) *Bedlam Chambers*, 225 9893, until 28 Aug, 1pm & 7pm, £9 (£8).

Maybe if you Choreograph Me, You Will Feel Better

●●●● Tania El Khoury is a gifted young Lebanese performance artist based in the UK. This tantalising solo gives one man at a time the power to decide what she'll do and how she will do it. Led to a 'secret' yet public location we speak to her via headset a series of instructions which she then obeys. With its built-in unpredictability this special piece is loaded with provocative political implications and just a trace of lost romance. (Donald Hutera) *Meet at Forest Café, forestfringe.co.uk*, times vary, until 27 Aug, free.

The Overcoat ●●●● An up-to-the-minute, fast-paced version of Gogol's great satire, Catherine Grosvenor's sharp and hilarious translation (for Finnish companies Rhymätæcteri and Ace Productions) finds us in the world of Edinburgh banking. A fine cast is led by the excellent Billy Mack as our unassuming hero, bank worker Akaky McAkaky, is hurtled through breakneck capitalist development and into the jaws

of the current recession. (Mark Brown) *Pleasance Dome*, 556 6550, until 29 Aug, 12.25pm, £10-£11 (£9-£10).

Phantasmagoria ●●●● This glum story about friendship betrayed aims for something moving and grown-up, but isn't helped by performances that vary from winsome to teeth-grindingly awful. The lazily episodic structure forfeits both dramatic momentum and emotional involvement, and the dialogue is so clunky you could stub your toe on it. (Alex Johnston) *Spillies @ The Merchants' Hall*, 220 5911, until 29 Aug, 8.35pm, £7 (£5).

The Pretender ●●●● This amounts to a series of amusing sketches centred on an Italian restaurant, wheeling through a series of archetypal characters. The piece is likeable and nicely performed by its ensemble, who create an array of recognisable contemporary neurotics, though its mildly satirical elements work more cleanly than its knockabout side. (Steve Cramer) *Underbelly*, 0844 545 8252, until 28 Aug, 1.45pm, £8.50-£9.50 (£9-£10).

Silken Veils ●●●● We join a Persian woman (Leila Ghaznavi) as she freaks out about her impending nuptials. Using puppetry, silhouette-work and animation to complement live action we are taken on a journey through her memories of Iran, suffused with the poetry of Rumi. A charming and tender portrait of the burden of love, in which the stringed performers shine. (Suzanne Black) *Assembly George Square*, 623 3030, until 28 Aug, 3.40pm, £9-£10 (£8-£9).

Some Small Love Story

●●●● Theatrical tales about love – particularly love lost – can so easily be overly saccharine, lacking the depth and sentiment to truly engage. Not so here. Stripped back simplicity is to the fore, as four excellent young performers reveal two great love stories, one spanning 52 years and one tragically cut down in its prime. The songs are beautiful and talented voices soar in this simple gem of a piece. (Anna Millar) *C ECA*, 0845 260 1234, until 29 Aug, 9.30pm, £8.50-£9.50 (£7.50-£8.50).

Steal Compass, Drive North, Disappear

●●●● Against a minimalist background of black walls and a scattering of blank chalkboards, Rachel Blackman unravels the story of Martin Charon, philandering video artist, university professor and father of two. Through the four women in his life (each flawlessly portrayed by Blackman, as is Martin) we learn about a man so in love with himself that he has forgotten who and what are truly important to him. Witty, insightful and heartbreaking. (Claire Ritchie) *Zoo Southside*, 662 6892, until 28 Aug, 4pm, £9 (£7).

Sunday in the Park with George

●●●● Sondheim's musical about the creation of impressionist masterpiece 'Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte' focuses on an obsessed Georges Seurat, whose dedication to his work ruins his life. As the painting's characters all offer perspectives on their inception, the painter becomes more fanatical and the creation of something beautiful quickly turns ugly. Wonderfully

presented by the RSAMD's One Academy, this is a moving and interesting look at the state of art throughout the years. (Kirstyn Smith) *C Chambers Street*, 0845 260 1234, until 29 Aug, 3.35pm, £13.50-£14.50 (£9.50-£12.50).

3rd Ring Out: the Emergency

●●●● If it's not perfect in execution, this piece is both intriguing and thought-provoking. The audience is ushered into a container functioning as an emergency response room and required to make life-and-death decisions about an ecological catastrophe in Norfolk. An intelligently employed multi-media interactive element makes this something of an audience-led thriller with ideological revelations becoming as dramatic as the floods and heatwaves outside. (Steve Cramer) *Pleasance Courtyard*, 556 6550, until 28 Aug, times vary, £7.50-£9 (£6-£8).

Unanswered, We Ride

●●●● Joe Tippett and Martha Wollner take on multiple roles to flank Joy Barrett's journey as bereaved mother Reese in a portrait of all-consuming, selfish grief. Despite one jarring attempt at an Irish accent, all aspects collide to create an engrossing study of a complex emotion. There are very few moments of levity to temper the onslaught of anguish. Bring tissues. (Suzanne Black) *theSpaces on the Mile*, 0845 508 8316, until 27 Aug, times vary, £9 (£8).

When Abel Met Cain

●●●● Raphael Rodan and Anastasis Sarakatsanos are talented musicians – between them they create a Middle-Eastern atmosphere using guitar, percussion and kanun (a Turkish stringed instrument). Rodan is also highly charismatic, telling tales of brotherhood and betrayal with passion and energy. Unfortunately, the stories fail to cohere, sitting awkwardly together. With some stronger material, though, these two should be a highlight at future Fringes. (Niki Boyle) *Paradise in The Vault*, 510 0022, until 28 Aug, 7.35pm, £5 (£3.50).

The World According to Bertie

●●●● Alexander McCall Smith's prose is brought pretty niftily to the stage as part twee New Town soap opera, part mild satire. An 11-strong cast bring to vivid life the various dramas amidst the chinking tea cups of Edinburgh's bourgeoisie, centring on the youngster of the title, an errant dog and some broken hearts. You might need to be a fan of the author to fully appreciate this, but it's at least well performed and interestingly staged. (Steve Cramer) *C Soco*, 0845 260 1234, until 29 Aug, times vary, £10.50-£12.50 (£8.50-£9.50).

Yours, Isabel

●●●● Set in 1940s America and based on a real correspondence, this play subverts the classic wartime romance to give an altogether more nuanced portrayal of the relationship between Isabel and her traditionally minded boyfriend Nick. Compelling performances and a script that makes up for in gusto what it loses in subtlety give voice to the progress of gender equality through Isabel's personal struggle for independence. (Amy Russell) *Paradise in The Vault*, 510 0022, until 29 Aug, 4.30pm, £5 (£4).