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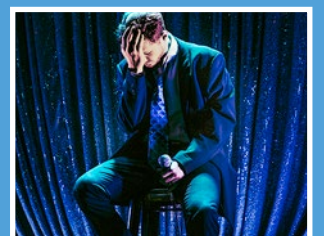
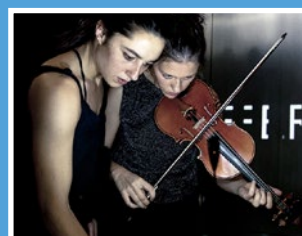
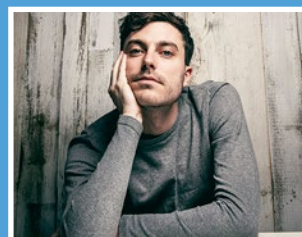
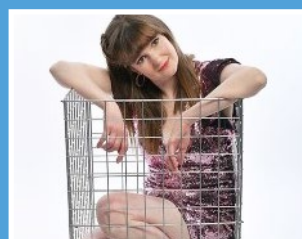
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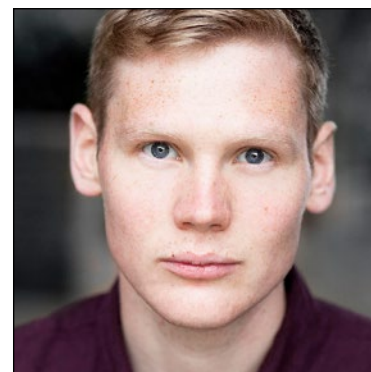
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ALL THESE INTERVIEWS WILL BE GOING ONLINE SOON
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Eight steps to getting more from the Fringe



TW:DIY is the online guide to doing cultural stuff. Launched by the TW team last summer, each year at the Edinburgh Festival we're asking some of our favourite performers, producers and directors to offer practical tips and advice for the wider fringe community.

This year we've got a long line of Fringe people ready to answer eight big questions, offering tips (some suitably silly, most usefully sensible!) on how to do the Edinburgh Festival better, as both a punter and a performer. To get things started, here is how performers Ian Smith, James McNicholas and Eric Lampaert, and artistic directors Oliver Forsyth and Chelsea McGuffin, responded.

Look out for plenty more great tips appearing at ThisWeekDIY.com throughout August. And more practical guides for people doing cultural stuff going live on that website in the year ahead.

1: Beyond posters and reviews, how do you suggest people pick shows to see at this year's Fringe?

Chelsea McGuffin: Take a risk! There is so much on and so much to see. See something suggested, see a must-see show and see a bunch of things you have never heard of, or a style or

form that is new to you. Edinburgh is something to be experienced so get in amongst it!

Ian Smith: Word of mouth is probably the best way to choose a show - find a like-minded friend and see what they've enjoyed the most. Also, it's worth just taking a chance and seeing something at random, because there is so much going on, you never know what might blow you away.

Oliver Forsyth: It's a tough one, but I always get swayed into shows based on a good, old-fashioned flyering pitch. If the person talking to you can get you interested or get you laughing, then the chances are they can do that on stage as well. Anyone can have a good poster.

James McNicholas: Throw a dart in Bristo Square, and whichever comedian it hits, you see their show.

Eric Lampaert: Take risks. Playing safe is boring. That's what the large majority of people do with the rest of their life, so don't do it at a festival. Get weird and challenge yourself to try new flavours.

2: What tips have you got for people trying to see as many shows as possible in one day - how can you power through?

Ian Smith: Allow enough time for toilet stops! I've tried to cram in three shows in a row before and the third one I just spent the whole time thinking about how much I needed to piss. I have no memory of that third show at all.

Oliver Forsyth: Plan your goddamn meals, people! No one ever munched their way through a plate of nachos with two pints and then thought, "Let's go concentrate in a dark room for 60 minutes". If you want that elusive seven-show day, then bananas, mixed nuts and water are your friends. Sounds unbelievably boring though.

Eric Lampaert: Schedules are useful, but allow room for improvising in case you're intrigued by a different show. You didn't come to the festival to sleep, so wake early, exercise, eat well and you should have plenty of energy to get you going all day. I'm not your Dad, you know what's best for you.

Chelsea McGuffin: Sugar, coffee, beer and wine as the day progresses. You will slump at some point but push

through the madness, it will blow your mind.

3: When people are reaching peak Fringe, what tips do you have for chilling out during the Festival?

Ian Smith: Find somewhere a bit away from the centre, or a cafe that not many people know about, to get away from the crowds. It's nice to have a few moments with a bit of space doing nothing, as opposed to jostling for space with the silent discos on the already busy pavements.

James McNicholas: Go to the beach. Being hassled by seagulls instead of flyerers is a very welcome change.

Oliver Forsyth: When I've gone up as a punter, I often take the first flyer I get given and then pretend I'm selling that show. All of a sudden no one talks to you, sits with you or bothers you. Works a treat.

4: What things do you think should be on every Fringe-goers Edinburgh Festival bucket list?

Eric Lampaert: Something new. A totally random experience that you force yourself to enjoy. So even if it's crap, you make yourself enjoy the moment.

Ian Smith: Getting in a good position to see the fireworks going off from the castle at the end of the day.

Oliver Forsyth: Couple of years back we climbed onto the roof of the union and hugged the dome. While that was obviously quite stupid, it also felt like a tick in the box. Don't tell The Pleasance though, they'll be fuming.

James McNicholas: Anything except "walk up Arthur's Seat". Everyone bangs on about walking up Arthur's Seat, but honestly who in God's name wants to do that on a hangover? Forget about it, get on with your lives.

5: Beyond the flyer, what tips have you got for performers trying to get people into their shows?

Ian Smith: As useless as this advice may seem, just working on making the show as good as it can be - and, for stand-up comedians in particular, there are a ton of guest slots where

you can perform and plug the show. Book in as many as you can do without tiring yourself out.

Oliver Forsyth: Not the most helpful advice, in fact it's painfully obvious, but making your show very good will go a long way. I think it can be easy in the chaos of Fringe to start prioritising all the noise around the Festival, rather than the work. Make something excellent and people will come. I hope!

James McNicholas: One year there was a show on at the Pleasance where, 20 minutes before his show, a guy would run around the courtyard completely naked except for a rugby ball over his genitals. He sold out every day.

6: The Fringe can be great for finding a new audience. What tips would you have for staying connected with that new audience beyond Edinburgh?

Oliver Forsyth: Put something new, and good, on as soon as possible afterwards. Then bang on about it and, if they liked the first piece, they'll come back.

James McNicholas: Social media. Why not replace the warmth of that beautiful live connection with the glacial coldness of the occasional 'like'?!

Eric Lampaert: Social media is the real answer. But a tandem ride on the back of a tiger will forever be seared in your mind and create an unbreakable connection.

Chelsea McGuffin: Talk to your audience. Get out front and meet the people seeing your show. Hear the good and bad and make real connections.

7: Performing at the Fringe is partly about building a network. What tips have you got for people looking to make connections in the industry?

Chelsea McGuffin: Be clear about what you want from the Fringe. Make a few great connections that have real potential rather than fifty that are window shoppers that you will never have time to follow up.

Ian Smith: Go and see shows and be nice to people. It's easy to just focus on yourself and get bogged down

with work. Go and see shows by interesting people and congratulate them and start a conversation if you see them afterwards.

Oliver Forsyth: Don't stay in. It's only one month, go out, meet people, see their shows and don't just hunt around for 'big' people. Anyone you meet there could be running Paines Plough in five years time, so be nice.

Eric Lampaert: Slap the most important person at the fringe in the face. They'll definitely remember you.

8: How would you recommend performers stay healthy during all the Fringe madness?

Ian Smith: My big thing is going to a steam room - I am a big fan of steam. Weirdly, I hate the genre of steam-punk. I join a gym in Edinburgh and use the pool and steam room to try and unwind (I'm putting this in brackets as I'm not confident it's true - but steam rooms might help your voice too. Who knows - it sounds right though).

Chelsea McGuffin: Sleep. Party every other day. Remember why you are there and what you planned to achieve. Fringe has highs and lows. Try not to ride the general wave, just be clear on yours. And meet all the artists you can.

James McNicholas: There is a myth that you cannot get fruit and vegetables in Edinburgh. This is not true: there is an old man who lives under one of the bridges who says he can get you an orange if you'll watch him show you his party trick.

Eric Lampaert: Eat, exercise, wank, wash, sleep, repeat.

Ian Smith is performing 'Half-Life' at Underbelly from 31 Jul-25 Aug.

James McNicholas is performing 'The Boxer' at Pleasance Courtyard from 31 Jul-25 Aug.

Eric Lampaert is performing 'Borne Of Chaos' at Laughing Horse @ The Counting House from 2-25 Aug.

Chelsea McGuffin is Artistic Director of Company2, who are staging 'Le Coup' at Underbelly's Circus Hub on The Meadows from 3-24 Aug.

Oliver Forsyth is Artistic Director of Smoke & Oakum Theatre and writer of 'Such Filthy F*cks', on at Pleasance Dome from 31 Jul-26 Aug.

INTERVIEWS

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

Photo by
Steve Ullathorne



CARO MEETS | COMEDY INTERVIEW

Robyn Perkins: Mating Selection

When we first saw Robyn Perkins at the Fringe - what seems like a very long time ago now - we knew she had the potential to go far because of her sharp and intelligent material and funny delivery. A few years later, it seems as though her career in comedy continues apace.

When I read about the premise of her show this year, I knew it would be another very interesting set. So it seemed to me it was about time to do a Q&A: to find out more about this year's show and how it came about, but also about Robyn's interesting background, and what plans she has for the future.

CM: Can you start by telling us about your show this year? What are the themes and ideas you'll be talking about?

RP: Last year at the Fringe, I did a dating show in front of a live audience. The show inspired me to research the science and morality of present day dating.

CM: You've said that the dating show led you to "question human morality"? Why was that?

RP: It's hard to explain without

giving away too much of the show. What I can say is that during that dating show, there was a certain level of audience interaction. I was quite surprised how the audience reacted, and how uncomfortable I was throughout the whole thing. This led me to research the evolution of morality and the science of dating. Essentially, why did that happen and what was the right thing to do?

CM: What made you decide it would be a good subject to explore through a comedy show?

RP: Dating is something most of the world will experience at some point...and is a minefield for humour. Equally, society today is - rightfully - very concerned with inclusivity and political correctness. Comedy has an opportunity to make people think; people let their guard down when laughing. I saw this experience as a great opportunity to talk about something real.

CM: You've approached this, and other work, from a rather scientific angle, presumably because you have a scientific

background? Can you tell us a bit about that?

RP: From the age of five I wanted to be a marine biologist. Later in life, I switched to landscape architecture. Both fields are quite research heavy - I once did two weeks of solid research on healing landscapes for a hospital in Vienna. As such, my brain has developed to question and research everything. Whenever something happens in life, my first instinct is to research. I guess when I started comedy, I just assumed everyone researched their premises. It wasn't until a few years in that I found out this is not a normal approach. But I guess that is what makes me unique?

CM: Do you think the conclusions you've reached will be helpful for those who are negotiating the business of dating? Or is it more likely to be helpful for students of sociology?

RP: If I had to choose, I think it will be more helpful to students of sociology than the business of dating. Having said that, it sparks debate between anyone who has ever questioned: what is the right thing to do in this situation? While dating is the premise that sparks the conversation - and is very much the throughline of the show - the most frequent feedback I get is from couples debating what they would have done.

CM: It's quite a few years since we first witnessed (and loved) a performance by you at the Edinburgh Fringe. You've been back several times since then. What makes you come back?

RP: Yes, I have been back every year. Though this is only my second full hour. I love the Fringe as it is the best place in the world to use comedy to explore more serious and sensitive issues, relevant in today's society.

CM: What is your favourite thing about being in Edinburgh for the Fringe?

RP: My favourite thing about the Edinburgh Fringe is the concentration of amazing artists. There is so much going on. On top of that, because the Fringe is so concentrated, geographically, it is great to have so many amazing shows and people a ten minute walk away. It's like a college campus, but instead of classes you have performances.

CM: How does the Fringe compare to other festivals you've performed at?

RP: Apart from being larger than every other festival, it has a sense of being home. This could be because I have been up every year since 2013, but I love it. It just feels right.

CM: You're from the US, but you are based in London just now, aren't you? How did you end up in the UK?

RP: I originally moved here for landscape architecture, working for Martha Schwartz. I fell in love with London, so moved jobs to stay in the city. I didn't start comedy until the very end of 2011. I love both comedy and the UK. London is such an incredible place to be a working comic.

CM: You clearly have other strings to your bow than comedy, what with the biology and economics and landscape architecture and furniture design... is this where you always saw yourself going? Were you a child who said "right, I'm going to be a scientific, stuff designing comedian" or did that all just happen by accident?

RP: I also was a professional potter for a couple of years... did I mention that?! I didn't intend to be so nomadic in terms of careers. I think it is a combination of me being impulsive combined with me being a firm believer in following my dreams. As soon as I find something new, I jump in, head first, without thinking about the repercussions, or any sort of stability. I think comedy will be long term, but who knows? We constantly change as humans, and it would be sad if our dreams didn't change with us.

CM: What aims and ambitions do you have for the future? Do you think you'll be adding new strings to the bow?

RP: For now I am enjoying focusing on comedy and developing as a performer. I am really loving working in the scientific angle into my shows. Having said that, I would LOVE to host a cooking show, so that may be somewhere in my future, which is more inspiring!

'Robyn Perkins: Mating Selection' is on at Underbelly from 31 Jul-25 Aug.

CHRIS MEETS | COMEDY INTERVIEW

Double Denim: Adventure Show

Michelle Brasier and Laura Frew first performed at the Fringe as part of the comedy group Backwards Anorak, before returning in 2017 as a double act in their first acclaimed outing as Double Denim. They’ve now staged three Double Denim shows back home in Australia and present the second of that trilogy - ‘Adventure Show’ - at Underbelly this August

I caught up with both of them to find about more about the shows, their Edinburgh Festival highs and lows, and how the comedy festivals in Australia compare to the big old Edinburgh Fringe.

CC: Let’s start at the start. Well, the start of this particular adventure. How did you guys come to be performing together in Double Denim?

MB: We used to be in a group called Backwards Anorak - we brought our show ‘Winter Is Coming’ to Edinburgh - and that was the two of us with Vince and Leo Milesi. My brother passed away when we were in Edinburgh doing that show and it really forced us all to look at what we were doing with our lives. The boys took some time off and we just took a chance to see what it would be like with just the women of the group. Turns out, pretty good!

LF: ‘Winter Is Coming’ was a ‘Game Of Thrones’ spoof musical and was amazing fun to do. But the year after that, everyone jumped on the ‘GOT’ musical bandwagon - yes we did it first! - so we had to think of something

else to do for the next project. Denim was basically the logical next step of taking all the fun we have off stage together and putting it on stage.

CC: For the uninitiated, what can we expect from a Double Denim show?

LF: Denim.

CC: Well, of course! What else?

MB: Double Denim shows are like a kids party but for grown ups. Our shows are very silly and engineered to make you feel joyous and nostalgic. There’s a lot of music and characters and sketches. And crabs.

CC: For the initiated, ie those who saw the original Double Denim show, how does ‘Adventure Show’ compare?

LF: It’s got an entirely different script

and different leotards. This show was definitely the hardest to write, as we were feeling the pressure from the success of our first show, but luckily we smashed the second album syndrome and came up with another hit. This one has more absurdity, more original songs, and more crabs.

MB: In the first show, Laura played the ‘straight man’ to my clown. We are both equally mad in this one. This show is more heightened. There is also far less audience participation than the first show. And more original music. And more The Rock! It’s the Eurovision of sketch/character comedy.

CC: For the uber initiated, ie those who saw ‘Double Denim Adventure Show’ when you previously performed it in Australia, will the Edinburgh version be different? Has it evolved since you debuted it last year?

LF: Bloody oath mate. We can’t be doing all our very specific 90s Aussie references for an international audience or they’d be more confused than Alf Stewart on the set of ‘Neighbours’. You get that reference, right? Ross Kemp on the set of ‘Coronation Street’ - that’s the UK version, I think.

MB: Yes, ‘Adventure Show’ originally had some very Australian references in it. We’ve workshopped it to make the show even better and we have changed all the references to be

more UK friendly. So, Missy Higgins becomes Atomic Kitten. Or maybe Billie Piper.

CC: You premiered the ‘Double Denim’ shows at the Adelaide Fringe. How do the Adelaide and Edinburgh Fringe’s compare?

LF: One is really hot, dry, flat and essentially in the desert. And one is cold, damp, hilly and essentially in a medieval village. My sweat levels vary dramatically between the two. Also the scale of the festivals is so different. Adelaide is the second biggest fringe in the world, but I’ll still see most of my mates every night in the bar post show. Edinburgh is just massive and all-consuming, so sometimes I’ll only manage to see my friends on social media as they are too far away on the ground.

MB: Yes, Edinburgh is like Adelaide on cocaine. Sometimes literally. For other people, obviously. Not for us. We are perfect angels. The Adelaide Fringe is excellent fun and it gets bigger every year. It’s really good preparation for Edinburgh. Like a training course for not sleeping.

CC: What were your first experiences of the Edinburgh Fringe like?

LF: My first Fringe was an absolute delight. We ended up at the Festival out of luck. We were asked over by Karen Koren of Gilded Balloon. I had no idea who she was, what the Fringe was, or even where Edinburgh was. I had no understanding of the opportunity we’d be given and I didn’t know what to expect at all. Ignorance is bliss. We managed to have a sell out season in our first year - at 3pm in a 140 seater - so you could say my first experience was somewhat blessed and skewed. I don’t know if it will ever be that good again, but I wouldn’t give those memories up for anything.

MB: I couldn’t believe how beautiful the city is. The people are so friendly and the castle is absolutely nuts. We were really lucky to have a lot of friends doing their first year too. Aunty Donna and Demi Lardner are good mates of ours and we had each other as a support network as well as our amazing venue. We were doing the ‘Game Of Thrones’ show, so we were lucky enough to break through and sell a lot of tickets. We even got to do some sketches and stuff for the BBC. I fell in love with the Festival and the city. It cemented itself in my heart really quickly and helped shape me as a performer for sure.

‘Double Denim: Adventure Show’ is on at Underbelly Cowgate from 1-25 Aug.

Lewys Holt: Phrases and Footnotes

I was really interested in Lewys Holt when I heard about him, not least because most of his work falls into two genres that seem to me like an unusual combination: comedy and dance.

This year he’s heading Fringe-wards with two different shows, playing alternately in one slot, one of which is definitely dance, the other of which is more at home in the theatre programme.

I spoke to Lewys to find out more about both of the shows, his creative process, and what he expects from the future.

CM: You are doing two shows in Edinburgh this year, performed on alternate dates, but let’s deal with them one at a time: can you start by telling us what to expect from ‘Phrases’?

LH: Absolutely! ‘Phrases’ is a kind of collage piece that I’ve been working on for nearly four years. It’s taken many forms but has settled in the current version for the Fringe. It has abstract, improvised dancing, it has some stand-up, some big synth and guitar sounds, and projections of writing. All of this is in service of providing solidarity for people who overthink, who obsess and who feel a lack of ability to connect. It’s funny... among other things, and usually gets called ‘thought-provoking’. What thoughts these are is kind of up to the viewer.

CM: Secondly, tell us a bit about ‘Footnotes’?

LH: ‘Footnotes’ is a generally more straightforward beast. Have you ever watched a lecturer or someone giving a presentation and noticed they really have no concern for whether or not it’s completely going over your head and they just keep ploughing on through their totally dense script so you just have to let it wash over you? This is the basis of ‘Footnotes’, but the script being delivered has a lot of, you

Photo by Samara Clifford



guessed it, footnotes. They start off quite benign, but as the lecture moves forward these constant interruptions take more and more disruptive forms... weird movement pieces, twitches, threats, OTT flirtations with audience members, long dances... MIME! So the strain of keeping the lecture on track becomes more and more intense.

CM: Do the two shows have common themes? In what ways are they alike and in what ways are they different?

LH: Yeah, there are definitely some common themes. They both seem to be to do with a general discomfort in one's own given or chosen identity, and a kind of fear of the ultimate loneliness that human existence essentially is. And a desire to connect with others in some kind of 'genuine' way. Although what that means is unclear to performer and he never quite figures it out.

At the same time the shows are vastly different in form. 'Footnotes' sits in the Theatre section of the brochure and really is a more theatrical piece. Its structure is a clear with a kind of rigid proposition alternating between lecture and footnote all the way through. 'Phrases' is in the Dance, Circus and Physical Theatre section of the brochure. Its collage-like form totally comes out of my background in choreography and contemporary dance. Things are presented without explanation, and transitions focus more on an ebb and flow of energy than logic. It's kind of a

exploration of texture as opposed to a representational framework. Sounds fun, eh!?

CM: Where did the inspiration come from for the two shows?

LH: With 'Footnotes' I'd have to say that the inspiration came from 'Infinite Jest' by David Foster Wallace. A thousand page book with very small writing containing over 200 extremely long footnotes that take on a life of their own. This book also spends a lot of time talking about existential loneliness and the desperation of its central characters to connect to others. Unsurprising!

No doubt all of this has had an effect on the making of 'Phrases' as well, but that's probably more ephemeral...as bloody always with that piece! A starting point of 'Phrases' was to take catchphrases and try to make a story from taking it way too seriously, or literally... So, "an apple a day keeps the doctor away"... what happens if I don't eat an apple a day... will he come and get me? Another was stream of consciousness writing that explores spirals of thought. The ideas of loneliness and a desire for connection kind of just became apparent once I'd already made some stuff which, I originally thought had no real theme. I guess it's all subconscious!

CM: How does your creative process work? How do you go about putting a show together?

LH: I made these two shows though a

Photo by
Matthew Cawrey



CARO MEETS | PHYSICAL INTERVIEW

series of residencies over three years, on and off - mainly off! - at Dance4 Nottingham, Yorkshire Dance Leeds, Attenborough Arts Centre Leicester, Curve Theatre Leicester, Pavillion Dance South West Bournemouth and Laban London, among others. I kind of throw things at the wall and see what sticks. I start on my own doing bits of writing and then try to put them on their feet, inviting friends and dramaturgs such as Tiia Ojala, Inari Hulkkonen, Eleanor Sikorski, Jack Britton, Charles Linehan and Stephanie McMann to look at things with me, so we can then chat about the material and edit it together and

then just rehearse like crazy

CM: What made you decide to bring two shows to the festival rather than one?

LH: I premiered the works as a double bill last year at Curve Theatre, Leicester. It only seemed right to give them both a fair shake at the Fringe. Doing just one would have been like deciding between children.

CM: What plans do you have for the shows after the Fringe run?

LH: The plan is to try and book a tour! And to show them at festivals. It would be nice to take them around Europe as

well... also I have a Canadian passport due to my father, so it would be great to go to the fringes out there.

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

LH: My partner's sister's wedding. Me and my partner are MC-ing! Also. I'm hosting a dance improvisation night called 'Roadhouse' and working in Luxembourg with choreographer Simone Mousset on a piece called 'The Passion Of Andrea 2', which is a sequel to a piece that never existed!

Lewys Holt performs 'Phrases' and 'Footnotes' at Summerhall on alternate days from 31 Jul-25 Aug.

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BY DANIEL CLARKSON
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Robin Morgan: What a man...



Photo by
Matt Stronge

CARO MEETS | COMEDY INTERVIEW

The TW team have seen and loved Robin Morgan’s work in the past and yet we have never done a Q&A with him. When I heard he would be back at the Fringe with a new show this summer - and it was hard to miss, given the title - I thought it was about time we did.

This year’s show - ‘What A Man, What A Man, What A Man, What A Mighty Good Man (Say It Again Now)’ looks at male role models and what it takes to be a good dad. I asked Robin some questions about that, other things in his life, and his hopes for the future.

CM: Okay, let’s start with your show this year. It has a very long title, doesn’t it? What is it all about?
RM: It DOES have a very long title, thank you! I thought it would be funny but it absolutely ruined my word count in the Fringe brochure, and having to type it out has become a chore. Lesson learnt. It’s a show about my dad, my son, and what makes a good male role model in 2019.

CM: Interesting. Can you give us an idea of what traits you consider to be intrinsic to the perfect male role model?
RM: I think the traits are ones that society would deem to be ‘feminine’ - caring, kind, supportive. And a load of big dick energy. My dad’s very sassy. I think that’s a good one.

CM: As a frequently failing mother, it seems to me that it’s way easier to be judged a ‘good dad’ than it does to be judged a ‘good mum’. Would you agree with that?
RM: Oh definitely. The bar is INCREDIBLY low to be considered a ‘good dad’. I was once told that I “talk to my son so nicely”, like I deserve a medal for not calling him a dickhead in public. Those double standards are a core theme of the show.

CM: What made you decide that this would be a good topic to create a show around?
RM: I touched upon it a bit in last year’s show, and it seemed to resonate with people. And weirdly I think it’s good for a man to be talking about it. It has led to a few grumpy sexist men walking out of the show when I’ve

previewed it. But maybe it’s okay to be pissing off the right people. I’ve never pissed people off before. That’s the sassiness of my Dad coming through.

CM: I feel as though you’ve been doing edfringe for maybe... four or five years...? Is that correct? What makes you keep coming back?
RM: This is my fourth year performing, and my third full hour show. I adore the Fringe. I had a really nice time last year, and started writing this new show as soon as I came back. It’s so inspiring to see everyone perform the work they’ve been working so hard on.

CM: What’s your favourite thing about Edinburgh/the festival?
RM: The sweet vibes. I’ve never said that before. But the feel of the festival, it’s so exciting. You can see a great show immediately after seeing the most weird batshit hour you’ve ever witnessed. And you’ll talk about the weird one much more than the good one. It’s just brilliant.

CM: What’s your least favourite thing about it?
RM: I would say the financial aspect, for both performer and punter, but I imagine everyone is saying that. Probably the fact it takes place over August when I have my birthday (on the 19th, thanks for asking) and audience members have NEVER BROUGHT A CAKE ALONG. I turn 30 this year. I want 30 cakes full of candles which will evacuate the entire venue due to smoke alarms going off. That’s the dream.

CM: What advice would you have for first time Fringe acts and audience members?
RM: Acts - see as many shows as possible. I didn’t know how far ‘stand-up’ could stretch until I went to Edinburgh. Audience members - don’t see as many shows as you think you want to. You’ll be so tired. See one show less and have a sit down and a glass of water.

CM: As well as doing stand up, you write for TV and radio. How does it feel writing then handing it over to someone else, rather than performing it yourself?
RM: I honestly love it. I don’t have any jealousy when I hear someone like Miles Jupp read out one of my jokes on the ‘News Quiz’ or Rachel Parris on the ‘Mash Report’. They’re both such brilliant shows to be a part of it, and I’m immensely proud to be part of the teams that make them. Teenage-comedy-fanboy me would adore that his jokes would make it on air. Who knows whether that’ll last, but for now - there’s no ego involved, just a genuine pleasure to be involved.

CM: Can you tell us about your radio programme ‘Relocation’?
RM: It’s a sitcom about a London couple who witness a murder and get put into witness protection in the South Wales Valleys. It’s set in Hirwaun, where my Dad was born, which is the direct opposite of London. I write and direct it, and I’ve given myself a small part, but I’ve been so lucky with the cast: Steve Speirs, Helen Monks, Clint Edwards, Vern Griffiths and Beth Granville are all superb. And if it comes back for a second series - I’ve got two new parts and have ideas in mind for who should play them.

CM: How did you get into all this? Did you always see yourself working in comedy? How did your career begin?
RM: I was always a fan of stand-up and comedy, especially as a teenager. I remember being thirteen and laughing along to ‘Have I Got News For You’ when the audience laughed, and pretended I understood what the joke about Ken Clarke meant.

‘Mock The Week’ was a real game changer for me - I adored Russell Howard, saw him many times, including at my local comedy club, the Glee in Cardiff, where I handed my CV in, and worked behind the bar for six years. I did my first gig while working there, and had certain shifts where an act got stuck in traffic, so did a set, before going back to work behind the bar. I love that place immensely - they’ve all been so good to me.

CM: Where do you see yourself going in the future? Do you have any big aims or ambitions...?
RM: I definitely want to keep writing stand-up shows and touring them. I’ve got a few sitcom scripts in various stages of development, and eventually would like to write films and books. I get quite bored doing the same thing over and over again, so it’s nice to have a few different jobs at the same time.

CM: What happens next with this show? Are you going on tour?
RM: I will! Probably ten to twelve dates next Spring.

CM: What’s coming up next for you after the Festival? Do you have any new stuff planned?
RM: My wife’s due to give birth on 5 Sep. So that will be where my immediate focus is. And then I’m writing Ellie Taylor’s new Radio 4 series with her, and then touring my show in the Spring.

Robin Morgan performs ‘What A Man, What A Man, What A Man, What A Mighty Good Man (Say It Again Now)’ at Laughing Horse @ The Pear Tree from 1-25 Aug.

Louisa

When I heard about the show that Australian Louisa Fitzhardinge is set to unleash on edfringe audiences this summer, I did wonder if the festival gods were looking out for me, given that I am a comedy lover who really loves European languages, correct spellings and grammar.

For yes, her show is all about language, something I suppose you might well have guessed, given the title. Anyway, I was intrigued and determined to find out more about this made-for-me show. So I put some questions to Louisa as soon as the opportunity arose.

CM: Right, let’s start at the beginning: can you tell us what the show is all about?
LF: ‘Comma Sutra’ is a love letter to language. It’s partly the story of me, an awkward, grammar-obsessed nerd, attempting to navigate a world in which signs spruiking “potato’s” are rife, and partly a very silly exploration of the joys of learning English, German, French and sign language.

CM: What made you decide to create a show about this? What inspired you?
LF: It all started with a love song. I wrote ‘Grammar Makes Me Hot’ because I was sick of love songs talking about outward beauty; where were the love songs that mentioned how attractive it is when someone speaks to you in beautiful, eloquent prose? Or the joys of being at a café and seeing someone reading the same book as you? It turns out I thoroughly enjoy writing pun-heavy, nerdy songs, so I started writing more and ‘Comma Sutra’ was born.

CM: How did you go about creating it? Did you just sit down and write it?
LF: I wrote a ten-minute version of the show, which won an award at a cabaret festival in Australia. The festival directors then invited me to develop the show into a full-length grammar spectacular, which I performed at the following year’s festival. That was in 2014, and I’ve been touring it around Australia ever since!

Fitzhardinge: Comma Sutra

CM: I have to say, as a comedy loving language pedant, that I am really freakin' excited. Other than me, who is this show aimed at?

LF: I'm excited that you're excited! Doing this show is incredible because I get to meet so many people who love language, many of whom come up to me after the show to share their favourite word or a particularly amusing pun. It makes for a really hyggelig atmosphere - there's one for the Scandiphiles! The show is very popular with teachers - especially English and language teachers - editors, writers, book-lovers and garden variety nerds, but you definitely don't need to be grammatically savvy to attend - it is, first and foremost, a fun show about words.

CM: My longest relationship (the current one, est. 2006) is with someone I bonded with over grammar, spelling, and foreign languages, so I think it might be the secret to successful partnership. Would you agree?

LF: I'm afraid I'm currently single, so I don't have the answer to that! Perhaps I'll meet a witty, loquacious partner in Edinburgh - gentlemen, please form a line outside my venue.

CM: What made you decide to bring the show to Edinburgh?

LF: I've been touring around Australia for years now, and two years ago had my first 'overseas' tour... to Tasmania. It's time to actually go abroad, and where better than the biggest fringe festival in the world?

CM: Have you been to the Edinburgh Fringe before? What do you expect from it?

LF: I performed in Edinburgh two years ago with a musical improvisation company called Impromptunes, and we had an incredible time. I'm hoping to meet an array of lovely nerds at my show, do a bit of impro, dance a lot, and consume my body weight in raclette at the George Square food stands.

CM: It sounds like the show's already done really well in Australia. Has the show developed or changed as time has gone on?

LF: Absolutely. One of my favourite parts of the show - a rousing anthem for grammar nerds - was only added in three seasons ago. We'd had great reviews so I was happy to sit on my laurels, but my amazing pianist, Greg Lavell, encouraged me to keep writing

songs and refining the show as the years went on, and I'm so glad he did as it's only gotten tighter and funnier with each season.

CM: Can we talk about the past now...? What's your background? How did you end up here? Did you always want to be a performer?

LF: I always sang in choirs as a kid, but the idea that I could actually eke out a living as a performer didn't occur to me until I was in my early twenties, immersing myself in Western Australia's comedy scene, making friends with talented, creative people who were writing and performing their own shows. I ended up ditching my law degree - sorry, Mum and Dad! - and studying music theatre, which led me to create a mini version of 'Comma Sutra' as part of a final year project. I had always been somewhat obsessed with improvised comedy, and eventually joined Impromptunes, The Big Hoo-Haa! Melbourne and Spontaneous Broadway, three fantastic Melbourne impro troupes that I am lucky enough to tour around Australia with.

CM: What's next for this show after Edinburgh? Is it headed anywhere else?



Photo by
Lachlan Woods

CARO MEETS | COMEDY INTERVIEW

LF: I'm really keen to visit New Zealand, so I've been looking into possible festivals and venues there. I generally base my touring decisions on countries and cities I'm keen to visit and then tack on a holiday! I wonder if the Maldives have any good comedy festivals...

CM: Finally, where do you stand with regard to the issue of split infinitives?

LF: I'm no linguistic prescriptivist. I

overuse hyphens, I regularly begin sentences with conjunctions, and I love an Oxford comma. I don't mind a split infinitive if it makes a sentence easier to parse. But I must draw the line at the use of 'literally' to mean 'figuratively'. If a show at Edinburgh Fringe literally blew you away, I'd be asking for a refund.

Louisa performs 'Comma Sutra' at Gilded Balloon Patter Hoose from 31 Jul-26 Aug.

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Harriet Dyer: The Dinosaur Show

CARO MEETS | COMEDY INTERVIEW

We have known for a while that Harriet Dyer is brilliant and she's someone I've been meaning to interview for sometime now. So, you know, I might have chosen to do a Q&A with her this year regardless of the topic of her set. But then, you see, I saw that it was called 'The Dinosaur Show' and - as a bit of a dinosaur fan myself - I just had to find out more.

Though not just about this year's show, of course. I was also interested in her other projects, both in Edinburgh and beyond. So we found out more about that too.

CM: Let's start at the beginning and talk about the content of your 2019 edfringe show. What's it all about? Does it exclusively cover the topic of dinosaurs?

HD: It's basically a vessel through which I'll be informing audiences about what really happened to the dinosaurs because, as per usual, we've all been led a merry dance down to a cavern of incorrectness and it's up to me to

restore all dinosaur knowledge to sufficient and correct factory settings.

CM: What made you decide that it was time for a show all about dinosaurs?

HD: I have always been fond of our prehistoric ex companions and have found that whenever I voiced that opinion or indeed cavorted around the internet with dinosaur-based ditties they were well received so I

figured "Hark! Now could now be the time to explore that further".

CM: So this is a lifelong thing? How did you get interested in dinosaurs to begin with?

HD: I spent my childhood eating nothing but Weetabix dipped in Bovril which led to a soggy existence. I was one boneless algae dance away from spilling on to my neighbour's ten pin bowling lane. An epiphany struck and from then on I never supped Bovril again and learned that with enough focus I didn't even need spit.

At this time - so, 1989 - all you needed was a few packets of Weetabix to send off for their plastic dinosaur collection, which became my reason for being. I managed all but the Muttaborrasaurus, I think if I had of succeeded in that final one my heart would now feel complete.

CM: Which are your top three dinosaurs and why?

HD: First, dilophosaurus = ICON. Secondly, diplodocus = I deem them trustworthy and reliable. Thirdly, plesiosaur = Taught me everything I know about the ocean.

CM: How did you get into all of this? How did you end up pursuing stand up as a career?

HD: I was a drunk and troubled disaster that no-one really wanted to

Photo by
Nigel Hillier



work with at uni, because I'd turn up with gin in an Evian bottle and, if I was staying late, dinner would be a gin jelly. This behaviour, amongst many things, led me to needing new teeth. Anyway, it turned out that my uni was

the only one in the country - at that time - doing stand-up comedy as a module. I turned up on the day of assessment with extra jelly and told the story of how I died twice when I was seventeen - which is funnier

Chris Grace: Voldemort & The Teenage Hogwarts

CARO MEETS | COMEDY INTERVIEW

If you were paying attention at last year's Edinburgh Festival you might have heard about - or seen - a well-received show called 'Voldemort & The Teenage Hogwarts Musical Parody'. If you missed out in 2018, then celebrations are in order, because it's back at the Fringe again this year.

Long term edfringe improv fans will probably recognise the show's producer, Chris Grace, from his appearances with Baby Wants Candy, but you might also have caught sight of him on the telly, given his long list of US TV appearances. I wanted to know more about the play, and his career, so arranged to fire some questions his way.

CM: I think the title is quite helpful in explaining the potential content of the play... but can you tell us a bit about the narrative? What story does the show tell?

CG: Our show follows young Tom Riddle when he was a student at Hogwarts, before he was ever a super-powerful lord of darkness. He's got all the trials and tribulations of any teenager: trying to make friends, find love, get along with his teachers. He also has a snake that whispers to him in Parseltongue.

CM: I feel pretty sure that despite the source material, this won't be suitable for children. Exactly how family un-friendly is it?

CG: We have some profanity and we have some saucy jokes, so children should probably not come. That said, it's a guideline, not a restriction, and we had many audience members of all ages and no one seemed traumatised... it's all in good fun. But just to be safe, if the kids are just now reading 'The Philosopher's Stone', they might hear some jokes or words that are a bit adult for them.

CM: What is your role in the proceedings? How did you get involved?

CG: I'm the producer! I saw the show in Los Angeles a few years ago, and I'm good friends with the authors, and I thought it was a perfect fit for the Edinburgh Fringe. I've been coming to the Fringe for many years with Baby Wants Candy so I thought 'Voldemort And The Teenage Hogwarts Musical Parody' would be a great first project for me to bring to Scotland.

CM: Can you tell us a bit about the creators of the show?

CG: Fiona Landers, Zach Reino, and Richie Root wrote the show. They are hilarious comedians from Los Angeles and they absolutely live and breathe the Harry Potter universe. I don't know anyone that knows more about that world than they do. Or who have more funny jokes to make about it either!



than it sounds! Getting laughs from dark times was liberating and I knew then that some way or another that's what I wanted to do. I never really had a plan B.

CM: Can you also tell us about your podcast?

HD: I've got bipolar and it's about attempting to celebrate the ups in a very up and down existence. It's called, 'Don't Worry, Bi (polar) Happy'.

CM: You've been performing at the Fringe for a while now. What makes you keep coming back to Edinburgh for the festival? Has it - or your perceptions of it - changed since the first time you performed there?

HD: The illness makes me come back. It can be such a wonderful place but can also harvest a mass of spiders living within your head. Very few people get it right straight away and it's all about finding a way to make it work best for you. I love that it's a place to make a show and that's what I love to do. Wang as much creativity out as one can muster.

Harriet Dyer performs The Dinosaur Show at Gilded Balloon Patter House from 31 Jul-26 Aug.

She also has another show. 'Harriet Dyer and Scott Gibson: That's Not a Lizard, That's My Grandmother' is on at Gilded Balloon at Old Tolbooth Market from 31 Jul-25 Aug.

s Musical Parody

CM: You're no stranger to Edinburgh, of course - as a performer as well as now in your producer role. What keeps you coming back?

CG: I'm totally recharged by seeing art. I don't really party much, I don't even really socialise that much, I don't get much energy from hanging out or hiking up Arthur's Seat. The thing I love is finding a show to go to, especially if I don't know much about it, and then either seeing the best thing I've ever seen or possibly the worst. Either way I leave that theatre inspired to, as Neil Gaiman would say, "make good art". For that experience, there is no place in the world better than the Edinburgh Fringe. Also... I love Noodles & Dumplings on Clerk St. which is honestly some of the best Chinese food I have ever had anywhere in the world.

CM: What is your favourite memory of the festival?

CG: Waiting on the pavement to get into Daniel Kitson at The Stand, playing Spørle games on a phone with my friends, none of us having ever seen him, and then seeing his amazing comedy, and then getting food from the disco chippy.

'Voldemort & The Teenage Hogwarts Musical Parody' is on at Assembly George Square Studios from 31 Jul-29 Aug.

CARO MEETS | THEATRE INTERVIEW

Gabriela Flarys: There she is

We're always on the lookout for the new and unusual stuff when it comes to covering the Fringe, and it sounds like 'There She Is' definitely falls into that category. It's a recently developed piece with a rather quirky central conceit - a whale being beached on the London rail network - that tackles themes of migration and displacement. It's the work of talented multi-tasker Gabriela Flarys. I spoke to her, to find out more.



Photo by Julia Testa

the lost foreigner very well. I often find myself asking if 'theatre' isn't already the right classification to embrace it all.

CM: It's a really interesting premise - what inspired it?

GF: Since I moved abroad, about five years ago, I started to reflect on how the experience of being displaced had changed me. I began to find myself pondering on what made me feel like a foreigner and how much of an affect I had on my surroundings, as well as how much of an affect my new surroundings had on me.

I like to think in metaphors and the whale came as one. A mammal that is by nature always in transit, migrating, a hybrid existence - reminding me of the process of diaspora. Existing in this middle plane, between the sea and the air, not entirely belonging to either. But what happens if this mammal gets displaced - beached - how catalytic can it be? A stranded whale activates microdynamics; people cannot move her, and they instead need to change their journey around her.

This is where the other side comes in, the experience of commuting in London, of which everyone can share stories of confusions and chaos - why not have this beached whale as the one who challenges transitions in the city? Life can often be, and often is, rather surreal, one may notice this if they are willing to pay attention and accept it, instead of allowing such oddities to be thrown underneath the blanket as invisible facts. To me it seems that it may take something as big as a whale on the tracks - something so big that it is impossible to ignore - to get people to acknowledge what they are so eager to reject.

CM: Is this your first full Edinburgh run? What made you want to take the show to the Fringe?

GF: Yes, and I am very excited about it. I have been to the Fringe before, but performing for a few days only.

This show is a project that I have carefully devised and I continue to love performing it. I have done a small version of it - 25 minutes - at a few theatre festivals in London, such as Sprint Festival at Camden's People Theatre and One Act festival at Stockwell Playhouse, events where I have always received very warm and amazing feedback that has encouraged me to carry on investing on the project.

I feel now is the right time to take the leap of putting this 45 minute version of the show out there and for a full run.

Edinburgh is the world's biggest theatre festival, a great platform where people from all walks of life can get to know more about my work. It is an investment for more professional opportunities in the future.

'There She Is' will be on at PQA Venues @ Riddles Court from 2-26 Aug.



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Matthew Greenhough: It'll Be Alt-Right On The Night



CHRIS MEETS | THEATRE INTERVIEW

Matthew Greenhough previously grabbed attention at the Edinburgh Fringe for the original incarnation of his show 'Bismillah! An ISIS Tragicomedy', which has since evolved and toured to much acclaim, and which is back for another festival run at Underbelly this August.

But we're really here to talk about his brand new show 'It'll Be Alt-Right On The Night'. Also exploring the common experiences but contrasting worldviews of its central characters, this new project began when Greenhough realised that he'd grown up in pretty much the same community as prominent alt-right/new-right YouTuber Paul Joseph Watson. How had they ended up with such diametrically opposed political opinions?

'It'll Be Alt-Right On The Night' explores how people can respond so differently when faced with the same social problems, while also putting a critical spotlight on both the right and left of the political spectrum. And also finding time for some humour and jazz reinterpretations of punk classics. I spoke to Matthew about the new show, how the idea for it evolved, and where those jazzy punk classics came from.

CC: What is the premise of 'It'll Be Alt-Right On The Night'?

MG: It's about two lads - Greeny and Stevo - who grew up as punks; so squats, dumpster-diving and PVA-glue-spiked hair.

We go on a journey through their friendship, from childhood to their adult lives. They're close as can be until their twenties, when they change... Or the world changes, they're not quite sure which.

By the time they are 28, one's a 'soyboy', while the other's a 'fascist'. Meanwhile, in a world of

trigger warnings and snowflakes, conservatism is the new punk rock.

It's basically a story of social justice warriors and the far-right. With Greeny and Stevo stuck on different sides of a seemingly impassable ideological divide, we ask: can their friendship survive? Who's right? Who's wrong? Are they stupid? Are they caught in a tide of unstoppable and destructive political populism? Or are they just a couple of nobheads?

In this time of ever-widening political polarisation, we wanted to

explore where the palpable anger is coming from, what's fuelling it, and what the realities are behind those opinions shat into the world in 240 characters.

We wanted to explore the reality behind the stereotypes of the 'social justice warrior' and the 'alt-right', in a way that we at Wound Up felt we could do best: with honesty, nuance, impartiality, live jazz renditions of seminal punk songs and some top quality dick jokes.

CC: Where did the idea to

explore these themes come from?

MG: The initial idea was sparked when I was reading an article about an alt-right YouTuber called Paul Joseph Watson. He's a huge figure in the 'new right' community. But also, like me, he's a working class white lad from Sheffield with a big mouth.

I couldn't believe that someone with such a similar background to me - we even both worked as cleaners in our late teens, and I'm pretty sure that was for the same company - could have developed such polar opposite opinions. It seemed bonkers. So I started watching his videos to try and work him out, because I found him fascinating: strangely charismatic, occasionally funny, and completely ideologically opposed to me in almost every way.

I branched out from there and explored more figures like him. And I found them equally fascinating. I also noticed that a lot of these far-right figures were actually recognising and explaining social problems that I'd also seen developing in our community. But then they'd run off on a tangent, ascribing blame and proposing solutions so far away from what I believed to be the truth, that the shift in gear was dizzying.

I became slightly hooked on these people and their YouTube videos, in a sort of masochistic way. And by this time their hateful rhetoric was starting to have real world implications, with things like Charlottesville and the #FreeTommyRobinson movement

Throughout, and in despite of my opposition to these YouTubers' beliefs, I completely empathised as to why this worldview would attract frustrated working class white lads looking for someone to blame. So I wanted to challenge what these people were saying, while also exploring why people still might be so willing to buy into their messages.

At the same time, I was also becoming frustrated with the left - especially in relation to Brexit and Trump - and the binary us-versus-them mentality that seemed to develop and then strengthen over the last few years.

It seemed like a complete hypocrisy from 'my side'. I'm a dyed-in-the-wool-lefty, and so it was beyond frustrating for me to see the left start to devour itself with its acidic moral superiority. I expected it of the right, but I felt let down by the left, and so I wanted to explore that hypocrisy in order to shine a light on it.

That was an important part of the project. My audience is inevitably going to be predominantly lefty, and there are endless shows bashing the right for left wing audiences to watch and agree the hell out of.

So while there's some of that in the show, I also wanted to hold a mirror up to my liberal audience and show them how they might be, in someways, acting the same

way as those they condemn. Then I discovered that the aforementioned Watson had made a video called 'Conservatism Is The New Punk Rock, Deal With It' and we were off!

CC: It sounds like your own life experiences have very much informed the piece. Is that right?

MG: Well, with the initial idea being sparked by that realisation of the surprising parallels between my life and that of a prominent alt-right YouTuber, it made sense to explore this topic from that angle.

So while the story is fictionalised, it is very much based on my experiences growing up, my love of punk, my acceptance into the punk scene in Sheffield in my teens, and how that shaped my life and worldview. I then developed that central idea with the show's director, Jonny Kelly. There are many events from my life in the play and it's strongly autobiographical.

Though I'm at pains to point out that, unlike my counterpart in the story, my mum never screwed some bloke called Greg at the Christmas party of the office where she worked at as a cleaner. She maintains they were just friends! I'm joking, obviously!

CC: Tell us about the musical element to the show? Why did you decide to reinterpret those punk rock classics as live jazz pieces?

MG: Punk music has been a passion of mine from my teens. The punk ethos and philosophy has been as impactful on me as anything else in my life. So in making a show inspired by my life, the musical element seemed like a no brainer - and especially after Watson made that 'Conservatism Is The New Punk Rock' video.

The jazz side came from the fact that I grew up with a lad called Steve who, while I was into punk, was a trumpet player who loved jazz. Beyond our differing musical tastes, our lives were very similar, and it always seemed odd to me that, despite our similarities, we had such different musical passions.

After I decided that the play was going to be about politics and punk, and when considering the story between my two protagonists, the parallel with mine and Steve's musical tastes being so different despite our similar backgrounds kept on popping into my mind.

And eventually it became a part of the story. Then Jonny worked it into the design of the piece and the actual Steve - that's Steve Wright - came on board to do the music in the show.

'It'll Be Alt-Right On The Night' is on at Pleasance Courtyard from 31 Jul-26 Aug. Bismillah! An ISIS Tragicomedy is on at Underbelly Cowgate from 1-25 Aug.

THREE TO SEE

ThreeWeeks editor Caro Moses recommends plenty of great shows with her Three To See tips

SHOWS ABOUT WOMEN IN HISTORY

Harriet Braine: Les Admirables | Gilded Balloon at Old Tolbooth Market | 31 Jul-25 Aug

Browsing through this year's Fringe Programme I've come across loads of shows featuring mentions of historical



women. And as I am someone who is rather keen on history – and especially keen on not having women erased from it – of course I wanted to do a tips section on it. My first choice of those on offer is this one from talented musical comedy purveyor Harriet Braine, who, in this year's show "brings forth a team of rebellious women from the history of science to help her wage battle against ignorance, patriarchy and her inner demons".

Chaika: First Woman In Space | theSpace On North Bridge | 2-17 Aug

This play is about Russian cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova, who was the first woman to fly in space, completing a solo mission on the Vostok 6 in June of 1963. Many will have heard of her already, because her story is pretty amazing: a textile-factory assembly worker and amateur skydiver prior to her recruitment to Russia's space programme, she continued on to a high profile political career. But this drama focuses on that solo mission, and the discovery, shortly after take-off, that there's a mechanical problem that could potentially have tragic consequences.

Herstory | theSpace @ Surgeons Hall | 12-17 Aug

This final choice is actually called 'Herstory', so there was no way I was going to leave it out. But of course that's not the only reason I am interested in it, it also looks super:

"This bold and bodacious cabaret chronicles the tales of some of the most enigmatic and misunderstood women throughout history. Get up close and personal as they name, shame and reclaim their stories in the books that have notoriously begrudged them of any space". Said stories are brought to life through song, movement and spoken word, which sounds wonderful.

THREE SHOWS WITH ANIMAL THEMES

Lucille And Cecilia | Assembly Rooms | 1-24 Aug

I love sea lions. I love them so much that they make me feel all squishy in my insides. And what, you may well be wondering, does that have to do with this show...? Well, everything, actually:



it's about two sea lions who perform in a circus, one of whom is desperate to escape, the other of which quite enjoys the attentions of their captor. This sounds like it will prove to be a funny and fabulous physical theatre piece, and yes, as established, I love sea lions, so it's definitely going on the list. And yes, I know they're not really sea lions.

Like Animals | Summerhall | 31 Jul-25 Aug

"A parrot says 'I love you'. A dolphin tries to speak. A woman spends a lifetime trying to understand". Another animal inspired show for you (hardly surprising, given it's, um, the theme of this Three To See section) and this time the focus is on love and communication in human relationships, inspired by true stories of animal language experiments and performed by an actual real life couple. Promises to be a blend of surreal comedy with moments of tenderness and vulnerability.

Ex-Batts And Broilers | Assembly Rooms | 13-24 Aug

And so to our final animal show, a piece about chickens, told via clowning, dark comedy, storytelling and love music, exploring female friendship and industrial meat farming. "Gail and Gemma are two delightful chickens in a cage, discovering life as it comes. Join them on a touching, eggciting and cut-throat journey through friendship and chickenhood. Heroically saved by Jimmy from battery and broiler farms, watch them compete for your affections, and decide on your favourite to vote out of the cage to pastures new!" Hurrah!

POLITICAL SHOWS

Alex Kealy: Rationale | Just The Tonic At The Caves | 1-25 Aug

There are always loads of political shows at the old edfringe, not least because – some would argue – all theatre is political. I'm not sure whether all comedy is political or not. I am pretty sure I can think of lots that isn't. But our first act definitely has a reputation for his political comedy. Alex Kealy's set this year focuses on rationality: how we prize it in arguments and in politics, but also how it's not really how our politics are informed. Instead we form opinions



based on emotional responses and then try to justify them with the rational after the fact. Looking forward to seeing him talk about that.

Sid Singh: Laughing Horse @ The Counting House | 1-25 Aug

"The world is filled with hate. Good! There's nothing wrong with hate. The problem is you're bad at it. Let comedian, human rights lawyer and

the guy who helped beat Donald Trump in court in January, Sid Singh, teach you how to hate! At the very least, even if you foolishly don't learn to hate, you'll laugh a lot!" OK, well I am mostly convinced by that blurb, to be honest, but also because we first noticed Sid Singh when he arrived at the Fringe last year and he's a very interesting guy. Absolutely one for your to-see list.

Standard: Elite | Bedlam Theatre | 31 Jul-25 Aug

And finally, in this Three To See of things political, we're leaving the comedy pages and heading over to the theatre section of the programme for this fun and interactive theatre experience about class and privilege. "There are two types of ticket. Everyone gets a Standard ticket.

You have to earn an Elite ticket. Together, we're going to tell a story... of a girl from Lowground spun from spiderweb and a boy from Highground carved from clouds. Standards work to build the story, Elites control which path the story takes. That's fair, right?" Um, yeah, maybe.

THREE PROMISING SKETCH COMEDY SHOWS

Moon: We Cannot Get Out | Pleasance Courtyard | 31 Jul-25 Aug

I love great sketch shows and rarely let a Fringe go by without doing a Three To See sketch selection. When I chose

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THREE TO SEE

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which three to tip this time it was so hard, though, with so many great acts doing great things. But I did choose, and I chose well, and here they are. We begin with this pairing, who got a very

positive critical response when they made their Edinburgh debut last year. Expect something rather immersive and rather dark, as the duo attempt to perform their show in a venue that is seemingly trying to kill them...

Children Of The Quorn™ | Just The Tonic at La Belle Angele | 1-25 Aug

My choosing of this one has absolutely nothing to do with the fact that I am a sucker for horrible puns. Oh no, it's because I think this show, given this duo's previous form, is going to be really really good. They also clearly think their show is going to be really, really good, because they refer to themselves as "future Fringe legends". And to be fair, I am not sure

I have ever seen or heard of a sketch show that incorporates a séance before, and you know what kind of urban myths séances can provoke, so maybe this will indeed prove legendary.

Felix And The Scootermen: Self-Help Yourself Famous | Underbelly Bristo Square | 31 Jul-26 Aug

"A-list, pop-star celebrities Felix Scoot and Lee Delamere welcome you behind the velvet rope to a self-help masterclass on how to become as famous as they are! Drawing on their sizeable years in the music biz with chart-topping band Felix & The Scootermen, they'll teach you how to write the hits and play the fame

game... and win... big!" If you think you recognise the pairing pictured in the edfringe listing for this, then there's a reason for that: one-time chart boppers The Hoosiers take a side-step into comedy with this satirical seminar that's destined to spiral out of control.

THREE COMEDY DEBUT HOURS

Jayne Edwards Is Top Bodybuilder Brian | Heroes @ Dragonfly | 1-25 Aug

For this set of tips I decided to focus on those comedians bringing their first full-hour solo shows to the Festival this year. And we are starting with Jayne Edwards, who has already made waves in other places in the UK

THREE PROMISING CHILDREN'S SHOWS

The Greatest Magic Show | Assembly Rooms | 1-24 Aug

So, time to focus on some kids' stuff, but it's so so so hard to choose because there is so so so much promising child-focused fare at the Fringe this year. But you know, I had to pick this one, because, well, look at it. It's quite literally 'The Greatest Magic Show'. I suppose you could argue that a name doesn't mean anything and you'd probably be right, but this show also has an impressive CV of selling out, winning awards and being loved a lot by critics. It's the work of a pair of rather skilled Melbourne-based comic magicians and frankly, they're coming a long way to perform this show for you, so come on, sort out your tickets now.

Doodle Pop | Assembly George Square Studios | 31 Jul - 25 Aug

Last year we sent one of our reviewers to a show called 'Boogie Woogie' and she thought it was excellent, proclaiming it to be: a "clever, thoughtful and well-structured show for young audiences, performed with gusto and accompanied by lovely keyboard jingles". So hurrah that the same company have returned to us (all the way from South Korea) with a new piece with a similar format. Brush Theatre use animated live doodling, projections, mime, physical acting, shadow play and puppetry to create the play, and it all works beautifully.

I'll Take You To Mrs Cole! | Pleasance Courtyard | 31 Jul-26 Aug

The last two shows were suitable for those aged three and up, this one is aimed at an older demographic, with a recommended age of eight and over, and it sounds super, not least because it involves Ska music. It's a co-production from Complicité



with her acclaimed character comedy, and is set to do the same in the Scottish capital this summer. In this show she plays a Leaver who "fights, metaphorically, to find meaning in the world, and anyone who voted Remain, physically", which sounds rather promising.

Michael Odewale: #BLACKBEARSMATTER | Pleasance Courtyard | 31 Jul-25 Aug

Comedy aficionados may already be well aware of the work of Michael Odewale, given his status as a BBC New Comedy Award finalist, his recent success at the 2019 Leicester Comedy Festival (he won Best New Show) and his appearances on 'Stand Up Central' and Radio 4. But he's now headed Fest-wards with his debut hour and you would be mad to miss it. Expect high quality stand-up as Odewale "tries to figure out what matters, and what's just noise".

Esther Manito: Crusade | Gilded Balloon Teviot | 31 Jul-25 Aug

Another competition finalist now (So You Think You're Funny, 2017, amongst others) and it's talented Lebanese British comedian Esther Manito: "Esther takes you on a whirlwind tour of what life is like when you can't meet the expectations of your identity. From battling comments online to facing head-on confrontations in person, she's not sure she wants to battle the crusade!"



and Polka Theatre, based on the well loved book of the same name, which tells the story of Ashley, whose hard working and single mother threatens him with a visit to the titular terrifying neighbour. But one day Ashley is magnetically drawn to Mrs Cole's door and finds himself lost in a wild and imaginative world.

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THREE CHORAL MUSIC SHOWS

Cantica Alba - Nature's Glory | St Andrew's and St George's West | 25 Aug

My daughter is a chorister these days (I didn't see that coming, I was used to hearing her sing songs by Little Mix) and as a result I am increasingly addicted to choral music. I mean, I liked it before, but now I more proactively seek it out. So, that being the case, I want some choral music from the old edfringe. And there's loads of it, so don't just rely on my recommendations. Do go to this though, because it's the excellent Edinburgh-based Cantica Alba, who'll be performing a programme of madrigals and partsongs exploring the world of nature in music, including works by Gibbons, Vautour, Delius, Britten and Bob Chilcott.

A Cappella Around The World | theSpace on North Bridge | 2-10 Aug

Some of the sounds you'll come across at this show by Canadian vocal duo Freeplay might contrast a little with the sounds of Cantica Alba, because judging by the listing info, and indeed the name of the show, they'll be performing a rather diverse



programme. Expect New York jazz, UK pop, European classical, Indian ragas and Brazilian samba delivered via the medium of voices and innovative live looping techniques.

Orchestre De Paris 2 - Britten's War Requiem | Usher Hall | 24 Aug

A natural place to go looking for classical music is the Edinburgh International Festival, so that's exactly where I went and, not surprisingly, turned up a number of performances that fit in this chorally-themed set of recommendations. Which one should I choose? No contest, actually, I would most love to get along to this performance of Britten's War Requiem, conducted by Daniel Harding and featuring the Edinburgh Festival Chorus, NYCOS National Girls Choir and soloists Emma Bell, Andrew Staples and Florian Boesch.

FEMINIST THEMES

Hear Word! Naija Woman Talk True | The Lyceum | 19-25 Aug

I'm pretty sure that, over the last few years, there's been an increase in the number of shows that are about feminist issues, or which explore the lives and culture of women. This year the programmes are, as ever, bursting with such productions, so it was quite hard to pick just three of them. We are starting with this International Festival show, described as "a life-affirming call for female solidarity and empowerment", which offers an insight into the lives of Nigerian women and the obstacles they face. Ten of the country's biggest stars tell stories of domestic violence, resilience and resistance, joy, sisterhood, and more, in what promises to be a funny, frank and honest performance.

Bait: Kill The Princess | Heroes @ The SpiegelYurt | 1-25 Aug

I know this sounds violent, but don't get the wrong idea, I am sure there won't be any actual princess slaying.



Because I think what's intended to get the axe here is the gender stereotypes that currently rule our lives and continue to be perpetuated - despite decades of resistance from feminists - by advertising, the media, books, workplaces... the list goes on. The creative types behind this piece are Lizzy Shakespeare and Michelle Madsen, a pair of Lecoq/LISPA-trained clowns, poets and storytellers who are going to use their myriad skills to create a thought-provoking and genre defying work.

Tea?... (With Milk) | theSpace @ Surgeon's Hall | 12-24 Aug

"Are you part of the 51% that is told to change almost every part of your natural body? You should cover up those bags under your eyes, Ewww, that spot on your chin - rub acid on it. Get rid of the moustache! Armpit hair - gross. Laser off all your natural hair below your eyebrows. Cover yourself in expensive products... because you're worthless!" Well, it very much sounds as though whoever devised this piece is mighty fed up with all the commercial and media pressure on women to conform to contemporary beauty standards. And I can reveal

that it's another talented duo, Niamh Callan and Elisha-Grace Lawrence, who've put together this promising play about two friends trying to work out what feminism means to them.

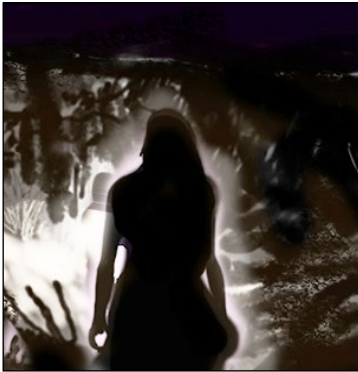
POETIC SHOWS

Rachel Long, Tania Nwachukwu & Hibaq Osman | Charlotte Square Gardens | 18 Aug

There's lots that's poetic all over the various festivals. But poetry is very much at home in a book, so I thought we'd head over to the fabulous Edinburgh International Book Festival for the first choice in this category. This event features Rachel Long, who founded Octavia, a poetry collective for women of colour, in response to the lack of representation in literature and academia. She appears alongside Tania Nwachukwu and Hibaq Osman for what promises to be an hour of excellent poetry.

Illegal | Underbelly Cowgate | 1-25 Aug

"An American artist must decide whether to overstay her visa or give up her chance to become a UK citizen. A Guatemalan graduate must decide whether to make the dangerous trek to America. As their parallel stories intertwine, two young women discover how far they'll go to get what they need... and who they'll hurt by



becoming illegal". This one's from the Fringe theatre programme, and it's a dramatic narrative poem written by Jessica Phillippi following an eight year period of dealing with the immigration process.

The Mariner's Song | Paradise in Augustines | 12-24 Aug

I chose this one on account of the fact that we absolutely know how good it is, because we saw it when it was on at the Fringe last year, and it was excellent. So, yes, we are very happy to see it back again this year to delight more Fringe-goers. Writer-performer Rajan Sharma uses classical mythology, family history and his own experience crewing on a deep sea challenge to create an intimate and poetic performance exploring humanity's relationship with the oceans, rivers and seas. We described

it as "beautiful and hypnotic": expect something lyrical and captivating

CLIMATE CHANGE STUFF

Sea Sick | CanadaHub @ King's Hall in association with Summerhall | 31 Jul-25 Aug

"The ocean contains the switch of life. Not land, not the atmosphere. The ocean. And that switch can be turned off". Climate change is - deservedly and obviously - an important issue at the moment, with concern over global warming clearly growing apace amid fears that time is running out to address the issues. In this critically acclaimed show, Canadian journalist, playwright and author Alanna Mitchell addresses that topic, and in particular the state of the oceans, telling a tale of "her journey to the bottom of the ocean, the demons she discovered there, and her hope for the future".

From Carbon's Casualties to Climate Solutions | Charlotte Square Gardens | 11 Aug

It would be easy to panic, of course, about climate change, and I think we're probably all doing it from time to time. But in the interests of trying to stay calm, I thought that next we could perhaps head over to the lovely and somewhat peaceful Charlotte Square Gardens to witness a discussion that will look at a possible way forward.



Taking part are 'headliner' Josh Haner, the New York Times photographer who has been visually documenting the consequences of global warming, Australian novelist and campaigner Tim Winton, and Laura Watts, author of 'Energy At The End Of The World' also appear.

When The Birds Come | Underbelly Cowgate | 1-25 Aug

Not sure this show is exactly about climate change, but the issue of global warming is certainly integral to the play's narrative. And of course I didn't just stick it in this section because of the environmental connection, I stuck it in because it sounds really good, and it's the work of the very clever Tallulah Brown. "Margaret has always told her little brother Stanley it's his fault the ice is melting. She doesn't want to live in the Alaskan tundra. She wants to run away and be a normal teenager in Anchorage.

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Years later, the rift between the siblings has seismically grown. In a fast-melting world, will love be left behind?"

ACTIVISTS

Sam Haygarth: Climate Crisis | Just The Tonic at The Mash House | 1-25 Aug

"Sam Haygarth was arrested recently. This is a show about being an activist. About melting ice caps and rising sea levels. About going to protests and not telling your parents. About the future. About the past. About why we must rebel". Yes, I know what you are all thinking. "She missed this one off the section on climate change and now she's trying to sneak it into a different one". To be fair, that is exactly the sort of thing I would do, so I honestly don't blame you for thinking it. You are wrong though. I chose Sam Haygarth for this section because Sam Haygarth is an activist. A funny one.

DeRay McKesson | Charlotte Square Gardens | 11 Aug

There will be quite a lot of the sort of people you might call activists over at the Edinburgh International Book Festival this August. Indeed, there is a whole strand entitled 'Power To

Sajeela Kersh: Fights Like A Girl! | The Stand's New Town Theatre | 2-12 Aug

"Multi award-winning comedian/activist, putting up her dukes and picking her battles! Trump, terrorists and everything in between. Time to call out the bullshit! What will you fight for?" Hurrah, it's Sajeela Kersh, entirely brilliant woman, who brings 'Fights Like A Girl' back to the Fringe for a short but no doubt fabulous run. She's an award winner, a fabulous raconteur, and her warm, engaging and thought-provoking stories are guaranteed to entertain.

EXHIBITIONS

Deer Dancer | Edinburgh Printmakers | 1-25 Aug

Artist, composer and performer Hanna Tuulikki is behind this ambitious multi artform project, which investigates how deer imitations are used in traditional dance forms, specifically in the Yaqui Deer Dance in Mexico and Arizona, the Highland Fling in Scotland and the Abbots Bromley Horn Dance in Staffordshire, England. It seems that the use of deer behaviours in such dances has something to say about gender performance and hetero-masculinity,

prisoners who suffered from mental illness and impairment, from all backgrounds and circumstances. It's been put together by guest curator Rab Houston of the University Of St Andrews and offers an examination of the personal histories of crime, recovery and release recorded in the archives of the National Records Of Scotland. Potentially highly revealing and definitely fascinating.

Zimbabwe Sculptures | Assembly George Square | 31 Jul-26 Aug

One of the reasons I like to recommend a few exhibitions every year is because they can be quite handy to fit in between your scheduled list of performed shows,



especially if they are conveniently located. This one is going to prove pretty handy in that respect because it's right at the heart of the Fringe, and you could easily squeeze it in after a show at any one of a number of prominent nearby venues. Anyway, it's a collection of brilliant stone sculptures from Zimbabwe, inspired by natural and spirit life, and created by a mixture of both young and established artists.

HORRIFYING THEMES

La Reprise. Histoire(s) du theatre (I) | The Lyceum | 3-5 Aug

"In April 2012, Ihsane Jarfi got talking to a group of young men in a car outside a gay club in Liège. Two weeks later, he was found dead at the edge of a wood. He had been tortured and violently murdered". This truly horrifying true story is the source for this piece of investigative theatre from the controversial Milo Rau, which stars a cast of six professional and non-professional actors and uses testimony from the young man's family, former partner, lawyers and one of his killers. One might wonder, maybe, what purpose such a dissection serves: its aim seems to be to look at what turns people into killers, and how poverty and deprivation are linked to despair and violence.

Nick Helm's I Think, You Stink! | Assembly Roxy | 31 Jul-24 Aug

Bit of a contrast to the previous recommendation, this one, because it's from the comedy section of the Fringe programme, and rather than be genuinely horrifying, it's a musical



B-movie, drive-in horror anthology tribute. Long term (dare I say older?) Fringe-goers may remember this from years gone by, as it's not the first time it's been performed here. But it was last on back in 2008, and that feels like a lifetime ago. So even if you have seen it back in the day, I feel pretty sure your memories will be fuzzy enough to warrant a return visit. And younger types, who were not around back then, you are in for a treat.

Father Of Lies | Sweet Novotel | 2-25 Aug

Another show that's been on here before, and another we're definitely glad to see back this year. It's also another that's based on an apparently true crime story, this time of a horrifying and mysterious unsolved murder that happened in Germany in the seventies, and involves haunted priests, jealous widowers and satanic cults. And I think trying to explain any more about what it's about and what happens might minimise your enjoyment of the show, so I will stop about the content of it now. But I will add this: it's won loads of acclaim, here in Edinburgh as well as at two London festivals, and I think it's a must for those of you with an interest in all things horror.

AMERICAN CLASSICS

Of Mice And Men | Gilded Balloon Teviot | 31 Jul-26 Aug

There's always loads of brand new and edgy stuff to partake of at the Fringe, but what about the classics? Isn't there a place for them? Well, yes there is, as is evidenced by the fact that there are always well attended stagings of works by the likes of Mr Shakespeare and Mr Wilde in Edinburgh each August. But I thought that, if we're honouring some favourites, we might go with a US theme this time, not least because of this excellent telling of John Steinbeck's acclaimed story. It's



back at the Festival after achieving critical acclaim here in 2015, and we are really pleased to see it again.

The Pat Hobby Stories | Gilded Balloon Teviot | 31 Jul-26 Aug

Source material you may not necessarily have come across, but definitely a classic author. LA-born actor Paul Birchard brings to life F Scott Fitzgerald's collection of stories, published in Esquire Magazine from 1940-41, about a down and out and alcoholic Hollywood screenwriter whose heyday has passed with the advent of 'talkies'. "Pat Hobby, script hack who was hot when the movies were dumb, lurches from job to job, managing by luck and low cunning to more or less avoid the abyss of unemployment and despair". Expect something funny and highly evocative of 1930s tinsel-town.

Well That's Oz | Venue 13 | 3-24 Aug

This one, as you might have worked out from the name of the show, is somewhat related to another classic novel from a US Author, 'The Wizard Of Oz' by L Frank Baum. However, I don't anticipate this show being, um, anything like traditional in its portrayal of that story, as it's an "absurdist adaptation" describing itself as a dark comedy. But you know, I like the idea of taking 'The Wizard Of Oz' and making a dark comedy out of it: after all, Baum's original works have some pretty dark moments in them. In this version, Scarecrow, Tin Man and Lion confront their existential struggles, while Dorothy tries to help but can't rise above the "dismal truth of the land of Oz".

STORYTELLERS

Joe Bor: The Story Of Walter And Herbert | Underbelly George Square | 1-25 Aug

Award-winning Fringe veteran Joe Bor is our first storyteller. His tale is that of the friendship between his grandad - world-renowned town planner Walter Bor - and Hollywood actor Herbert Lom, and the journey they made from Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia to the UK. Bor has created his show using a wealth of material - family photos, interviews and letters between the two - and it's full of funny and charming anecdotes as well as details of the ups and downs of the relationship. Expect a fascinating show, in which the comedian draws comparisons to his own life and shares some startling and hilarious discoveries.

Dave Green: Guest Bed | Just The Tonic at The Mash House | 1-25 Aug

"Dave Green grew up with two beds in his bedroom and never knew why. Just as mysterious is the chronic pain condition which doctors are suggesting is all in his head. When his side job as a celebrity lookalike connects him with a familiar face



The People'. The inspirational DeRay McKesson is the selector of that strand, as well as being the focus of his own event. Back in 2014, he quit his job and moved to Ferguson, Missouri to join protests against the police shooting of unarmed African American teenager Michael Brown Jr. He spent 400 days on the streets as an activist, and helped bring about the Black Lives Matter movement. He'll be talking to Lauretta Charlton about his book 'On The Other Side Of Freedom'.

which is all very intriguing, if not terribly surprising.

Prisoners Or Patients? Criminal Insanity in Victorian Scotland | National Records Of Scotland | 1-26 Aug

Well, if we're honest, this - on the face of it - might sound a bit grim. On the other hand, I think there are many out there for whom this will sound incredibly interesting. As you may have gathered by now, this exhibition tells the stories of Victorian-era



from his childhood, it leads him down a path of discovery which forces him to confront his past". I noticed this one because when I was little I had a friend who had a mysterious second bed in her room, though now that I am older, it seems less mysterious. That's not why I am recommending it though, I am recommending it because Dave Green is really really good.

Borne Of Chaos | Laughing Horse @ The Counting House | 2-25 Aug

Another respected Fringe veteran - award winning, Lecoq-trained, all round human of brilliance Eric Lampaert - is the storyteller behind this show, and it's his own, very personal story. This is a performance that walks the line between theatre and comedy, exploring hallucination, anxiety, depression, mental health hospitals and tales of escape, hypnotherapy, public shaming, near-death experiences and a constant drug-free state of Euphoria. "From the tomb of the womb to the womb of the tomb. From homeless to Hollywood. This is an honest retelling of Eric Lampaert's trials and tribulations from birth to now and how he made it from the streets to cinema. Eric is finally a strong enough performer to share his story".

IMPRESSIONISTS

Naomi McDonald: Copycat | Just The Tonic At The Caves | 1-25 Aug

There aren't many impressionists at the Fringe, I have to say, but I feel pretty sure they've never really gone out of fashion. So I'm not going to pretend there's been a sudden burgeoning this year as justification for this section, I'm just going to admit that I really enjoy an impressionist, so I decided I'd persuade you all to go and see some this Festival. Starting with the excellent Naomi McDonald, who you may already know via her work



on Radio 2, Capital FM and Cartoon Network, as well as with the well loved and long running NewsRevue. Expect to see 'Adele', 'Nigella' and 'Melania' as you've never seen them before, accompanied by spoof songs, in a show of "full on ridiculousness".

Steff Todd: Reality Check | Just The Tonic At The Caves | 1-25 Aug

This is Fringe debut time for Steff Todd, award winning comedian and impressionist, but it's entirely possible you'll already have heard of her, because she's one of those creatives who has done that very modern thing of 'going viral' with her impressions of a wide range of pop culture icons. I think those of you who enjoy stuff like The Kardashians, 'Love Island' and 'The X-Factor' will know who they are. Definitely on the up, and you should definitely check her out.

Josh Berry: Who Does He Think He Is? | Assembly George Square Studios | 31 Jul-25 Aug

Okay, well we just did two woman impressionists in a row, so I thought I ought to acknowledge that male persons can be impressionists too. Honestly, they can be super. And here's one that's doing very well for himself, racking up those views on YouTube and listens on iTunes, as well as making appearances on 'Michael McIntyre's Big Show', 'The Tracey Ullman Show', 'Dead Ringers' and 'Newsjack'. Absolutely one for the impressionist-aficionado's to do list.

GHOSTLY GOINGS ON

Susan Fletcher & Michelle Paver | Charlotte Square Gardens | 19 Aug

Despite not actually really believing in ghosts at all, I have always been a fan of a good ghost story and I spent a lot of my youthful reading time on them. So when I saw there might be an opportunity to create a section on ghostly stuff I was very happy. And where better to start with ghost stories than at a Book Festival? Especially if you might want to gather tips on writing a good one. This event features the award winning Susan Fletcher, whose novel 'House Of Glass' focuses on love, lies and ghosts at the start of the Great War, and Michelle Paver, writer of gothic thriller 'Wakenhyrst'. The pair will discuss "the art of building spine-tingling suspense". Hurrah.

Madame George By Keir McAllister | Gilded Balloon Patter Hoose | 31 Jul-26 Aug

This one's more about a medium than ghosts, but it still counts, obviously. And it's a comedic thriller in the Fringe's theatre section, so there'll be laughter as well as a supernatural component. "Madame George is a psychic in a slump. It's been two



years, seven months and eleven days since her mum died and she's still not bothered to get in touch. Then there's the neighbour, the annoyingly persistent and intrusive Mr Doyle, who also happens to be her last remaining client. Things are in a rut when a message from the other side finally does come through... question is: will Madame George want to hear it?"

Supernatural: Wonder Tales From Scotland | Scottish Storytelling Centre | 13-26 Aug

This one would have been very much at home in the Storytellers section too, because it's a show by a very much renowned storyteller, Dougie Mackay. Drawing on Highland and Scots folk history and myth, Mackay shares tales of supernatural wonders from Scotland's traditional tales. You can expect to hear about strange places full of fantastic creatures, curious characters and ferocious beasts, gathered from the past but delivered with a fresh and contemporary perspective. And it's probably suitable for family outing, too, if you have older kids to entertain - guidance says it's okay for children over eight.

CABARET TREATS

Super Hugh-Man | Assembly George Square Studios | 31 Jul-26 Aug

This is a show that really jumped out at me from the pages of the Fringe Programme when I first perused the Cabaret section a few weeks ago. Then I realised, that's probably because it's played to acclaim at the Fringe before. But I missed seeing it last time, which is why I added it straight to my 2019 priority list. And then, because I am not selfish, I thought I'd tell you all about it too. It's a solo show following the journey



of a young Maori who finds himself, through the inspiration of his hero, coming to realise that it's okay to be a different kind of man. It's delivered via the media of comedy, storytelling, dance, song and Maori cultural performing arts, and we already know it's excellent.

Just Desserts | Underbelly Cowgate | 1-11 Aug

This is another import from down under, and I recommend it to all of you out there who have a sweet tooth. For lo, it involves dessert. No, not just in the title, real dessert: the star of the show, award-winning Australian cabaret star Michelle Pearson creates and serves up delicious confections, all while delivering a hugely entertaining and interesting show. "Featuring a live rock-pop-powered soundtrack, this sensual chanteuse explores empowerment, social pressure, our obsession with perfection and desire through song, sex and sugar". Super.

Ada Campe And The Psychic Duck | The Stand's New Town Theatre | 3-25 Aug

For our final cabaret pick, I thought we might head over to Edinburgh's New Town for a date with the wonderful Ada Campe, who brings her Psychic Duck show back to The Stand's New Town Theatre for another run. Ada, the comedy alter-

ego of performer and researcher Naomi Paxton, is a comical and brilliant raconteur who is keen on audience participation and has a long and entertaining story to tell. And from what I have heard (I've not yet had the pleasure of seeing it myself) this show is truly bonkers. But you know, bonkers is good, especially when it's a show involving clairvoyant anatids, and particularly if you've been recently overdosing on highbrow edfringe tragedies.

DARK THEMES

Leave a Message | Gilded Balloon Patter Hoose | 31 Jul-26 Aug

"Two friends, Ed and Sarah, travel to the small bedsit where Ed's father passed away just a few days earlier. The place is wretched, filthy and reeking of alcohol. They begin the unenviable task of trawling through the squalid wreckage before them... as they wade through the debris, pouring over the contents, the fragments of one lost life begin to coalesce, just as another starts to show signs of cracking. Will any of us be remembered for anything more than the mess we leave behind?" A comedy, believe it or not, based on the real life experience of performer Ed Coleman, and a poignant character study created with wit and honesty.

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THREE TO SEE

WE RECOMMEND SHOWS FOR YOU TO SEE

The Burning | Pleasance Courtyard | 31 Jul-26 Aug

There's always darkness where witches are concerned, no matter what angle you're coming from. If the witches really are witches, then they're in league with the devil. And if they're not real witches, then they're being horribly persecuted for being women who won't be quiet. Anyway, as you'll guess from that preamble, this latest show from the excellent Incognito Theatre is focused on the lives of 'witches' and their hunters in a story through time, exposing the



effects of capitalism and fear and the ages-old trade-off that women are forced to make between goodness and power. Their last two shows were brilliant, so I'm expecting great things from this one.

Shine | Zoo Southside | 2-26 Aug

"Your daughter is missing. You are the only one who has not given up the search. You hear voices. They guide you. They also haunt you. Will you surrender to them? Or will you shine?" This is an immersive psychological thriller, created and performed by a real life couple, dealing with every parent's worst nightmare, the mysterious disappearance of a child. The show uses binaural sound to create intensive stereo sensations, questions the reliability of the senses, and asks audience members to explore their own psyches. I'm totally intrigued by this, it sounds rather different and completely fascinating.

FOLK TALE THEMES

Roots | Church Hill Theatre | 9-25 Aug

This is one from the International Festival, and it sounds ever so intriguing to me, not least because I am a bit of a fan of old films and folk tale inspired themes. In 'Roots', UK based company 1927 "blends sophisticated stagecraft with the early days of cinema, all brought to life through the company's signature fusion of handcrafted animation and storytelling, with a live musical score involving donkeys' jaws, musical saws and Peruvian prayer boxes". Do I need to say any more? No, I imagine that's been persuasive enough.



Sary | Sweet Novotel | 2-25 Aug

You know how we did a section on feminist stuff and I said that these days there's always lots of feminist stuff? Well, here's something else that's a bit feminist, but also based on a 19th Century tale from Sussex, which is why I'm mentioning it here. Of course, the other reason I am mentioning it is because it sounds amazing. It's described as a piece of "feminist folk horror", and it explores themes of female sexuality, ageing and loss as kinds of alchemy. "They call me witch. A teeth-gnasher. A shape-shifter. When a man says a woman turns into a hare, it means she were too quick for him!" And Amen to that, actually.

Honeypot | Greenside @ Nicolson Square | 2-10 Aug

I didn't especially intend woman centred pieces to figure so highly in this section on stuff with a folk tale element, but I suppose, thinking about it, it makes sense. This play is from an all female team, and offers a "brutally honest, comic and uncensored subversion of the famously tragic folklore narratives", told through the eyes of multicultural, post-pubescent, fairy tale heroines, and reflecting on the daily trials and tribulations of contemporary women. "Be prepared to challenge shallow and subconscious stereotypes with a sisterhood of empowered female characters" warns the blurb. I reckon you are all up to that challenge.

MEN AND MASCULINITY

Daniel Audritt: Better Man | Just The Tonic At The Caves | 1-25 Aug

After all that pesky womanhood focused stuff, I suppose it's only fair to shine a spotlight on shows with men and maleness as central themes. I'm starting in the comedy section, with



a show that I suspect will be funny, but also has pertinent points to make about love, relationships, modern masculinity and what it takes to be a good guy. It's Daniel Audritt's debut hour here at the old edfringe, but that doesn't mean he's remotely new to the world of comedy: the director and co-writer of Comedy Central's 'Modern Horror Stories', he's also written for the likes of 'Mock the Week', 'The News Quiz', 'Dead Ringers' and 'NewsJack'.

Mighty | Pleasance Courtyard | 31 Jul-16 Aug

You might think I've made a mistake including this one in the masculinity section, because this TED-talk-meets-theatre piece has its primary focus on people's prejudices with regard to height, and whether or not we should be taking 'heightism' more seriously. It's clear that masculinity is very much a part of the issue that's under discussion here, though, as Jack AG Britton tackles body image and mental health while telling his true story in a show that's (almost) got it all - comedy, live music and spoken word.

Eshaan Akbar Infidel-ity | Gilded Balloon Teviot | 31 Jul-26 Aug

And so to our final man-focused tip, and if you're looking for a show (and who knows, maybe you really are) that tackles masculinity head on, deals with some serious issues, but is also the work of a funny fast-rising comedian, then this is very probably the show for you. "What does it take to be a man these days? After #MeToo, incel attacks and man buns, Eshaan Akbar explores masculinity and his relationship with men, women and himself. Love and loss can teach you a lot about who you actually are". See, I told you. Perfect.

MUSICAL THEATRE

Islander: A New Musical | Roundabout @ Summerhall | 31 Jul-25 Aug

"Eilidh stares out to sea and dreams of a new life beyond her lonely island. Myth and reality collide when the tide washes a mysterious stranger onto her beach, changing her life forever". I like to look out for new musicals



that are on at the Fringe, and that's how I came across this one. And oh, does it sound like a goodie. It's got a contemporary Scottish folk inspired

score, and the cast live-record and layer their voices, which, I'm assured, will "create an ethereal adventure for the ears and imagination". Lovely.

Paradise Lodge | Underbelly Bristo Square | 31 Jul-26 Aug

And from the ethereal to the hilarious: 'Paradise Lodge' is a funny yet heart-wrenching piece of musical theatre that explores writer and performer Steve Cooper's experience of caring for his mother in law as she succumbed to dementia. The show explores the nature of identity, reality and loss, as Eric and Kylie, a dysfunctional ukulele musical duo called The Doodlebugs, embark on their first gig together at the Paradise Lodge Care Home, and take their audience back to a time when their whole lives lay ahead of them. It promises to have audiences "laughing, crying and singing their hearts out", so yes, I will be there.

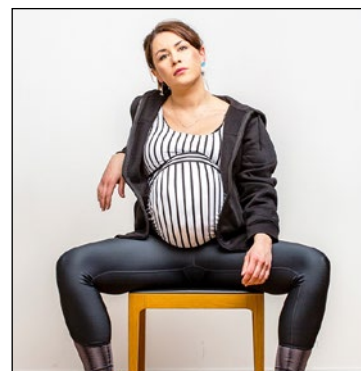
Beat | Pleasance Dome | 31 Jul-26 Aug

This isn't exactly a new show. It's been performed to great acclaim across Europe following its 2011 premiere, and has won a Moliere Award, which, you may already know, is basically a French equivalent to the Olivier Award. But hurry for the fact that it's now getting its UK premiere and we get to witness it in all its glory. It tells the story of Alfie, who is not like the other kids: his parents are irritated, his teachers are exasperated, but Alfie doesn't care as long as he can play his drums, and turn "his everyday routine into a life bursting with wonder and music". Sounds ace, and I reckon this might have some appeal for teenagers, if you are struggling to entertain one this summer.

MOTHERHOOD

With Child | Pleasance Courtyard | 31 Jul-25 Aug

Yes, yes, more woman stuff, but it's not my fault, I didn't make it happen, it's all there in the programme. It's as though women have a lot of stuff to get off their chests lately, and if that's why I keep finding loads of female-focused themes at the Fringe, then I'm happy to talk about it. Anyway, there are lots of shows with a pregnancy connection this time and here's my first pick of them. In this solo show from Clare Pointing, inspired by society's pressure on women to be maternal, kind, considerate individuals, we meet



six different women, all pregnant: do we judge them differently because of their condition?

30 | theSpace @ Surgeon's Hall | 19-24 Aug

"One room, one baby, thirty days. Naomi's being tested for motherhood. If she passes, she can have a child, but her cousin failed six times and she's feeling nervous. The voices of her invigilators play over the tannoy while she stands alone with a cloth doll. Through simulations, the doll becomes a real baby, which can see, hear and feel everything except pain". This sounds rather dystopian, doesn't it? And yet, I can't help thinking I should have been forced to do this before I was allowed to reproduce. Just kidding, I'm a brilliant mother. A mother who's telling you to do as you're told, so go on, go see this show.

Fox | Pleasance Courtyard | 31 Jul-26 Aug

This play by Katie Guicciardi, directed by Offie nominee Lisa Cagnacci, is about more than just motherhood, and is inspired by events in the life of the playwright. Contrasting the topic of post-partum depression with the subject of homelessness, 'Fox' explores how becoming a mother can change the way a woman perceives the world, and how the world perceives her. But it also explores issues surrounding class and gentrification, and seeing an area change around you. It sounds like a really poignant and insightful piece, addressing privilege and isolation in a contemporary, urban environment.

DANCE PICKS

For Now We See Through A Mirror, Darkly | Greenside @ Nicolson Square | 13-24 Aug

This is one from the Made In Scotland showcase, what's described as a "mystical, innovative dance performance about the connection between what we see and what we believe". Integral to the performance is a voice over describing and interpreting elements that can't be seen, which makes the show accessible to visually impaired audiences, but also facilitates understanding of the abstract content for all. "A visually striking and funny world, which can be placed under the slogan of its favourite motif - a smiling snake, a dying sun and the gentle droppings of unclean slime".

The Forecast | Dance Base | 21-25 Aug

Amy Bell blends dance, text, animation and a live digital soundscape to create this piece, which challenges conventional ideas of gender and movement, and was inspired by wondering quite where all the queer women in dance are. She's approached the topic through the lens of the weather (which is why it's called 'The Forecast', obviously) and attempts to challenge stereotypes



with a "more radical notion of femininity", celebrating female queerness. I can't help thinking this might be the sort of dance piece that could hold the attention of those of you who don't think you like dance. So why not give it a whirl?

(Some)Body |

C Venues - C Aquila | 1-26 Aug

I think this one speaks for itself: "Does a body make us human? Does it have a soul? What hides beneath nudity? What is nudity itself? Nudity is extreme openness and vulnerability and, at the same time, an incomprehensible power connected not only with sexuality. The magic of Eros, the compelling power of nudity, the way up and the way down, transcendence and co-creation, fragility and strength. Life, death, pain and love - all of this complex and unspeakable physical phenomenon is what we are researching in '(Some)Body'".

MENTAL HEALTH AND THE MIND

Yasmin Rahman: The Power Of Friendship | Charlotte Square Gardens | 10 Aug

Back to the Edinburgh International Book Festival now for our final set of three, for a date with Yasmin Rahman,



writer of 'All The Things We Never Said'. It's a debut novel that deals with suicide as well as the power of friendship. Her heroine Mehreen is going through the darkest of times and intends to end her life, but the process of finding new friends makes her realise it may not be the best way forward. This event explores the very pressing issue of mental health in a digital age, and how to find the happiness and strength to keep going.

Passengers | Summerhall | 31 Jul-25 Aug

"Max wants to tell you a story. He's not entirely sure why or even who he is. Is he savage, peacekeeper or critic... or all of these? He's hoping you'll be able to help. Using the audience as judge, witness, confidante, the three versions of Max battle for supremacy over the self through storytelling, cabaret and operatic murder". This dark comedy is semi-autobiographical, drawing on creator Kit Redstone's mild Dissociative Identity Disorder to depict mental battles and the power of the mind to protect itself from pain. It invites audiences to see the self in a whole new way.

Samantha Pressdee: Covered | PQA Venues @ Riddles Court | 2-26 Aug

For anyone not aware of her work, Samantha Pressdee is a comedian and activist who with her latest show focuses on mental health provision, the benefits system and social cleansing, and it's very much a call to action. The performer has herself been through the system: hospitalised after a mental breakdown following the death of her father, she found herself spending time in a police cell whilst waiting for NHS help, and subsequently struggled to get her mental health needs met whilst navigating the welfare system. She's a brilliant woman, and a funny one, and this show will be very much worth an hour of your time.

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