



An Edinburgh Festival Punter

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News Snippets - August 2007 to August 2008

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Where does all the punters' cash go?

An interesting article in the Edinburgh Evening News which looks at [where the punters' money goes](#), although we hear the usual refrain that nobody owns up to making any money out of the festival! Also, the figures appear to be largely 3-4 years old.

International Festival and Book Festival ticket sales up

The BBC [reports](#) that the 2008 International Festival took £2.6m in ticket sales, a 7% rise over the previous year. Matthew Bourne's Dorian Gray was the festival's most successful dance show ever at the box office. A full summary can be found [here](#) on the EIF web site. Ticket sales at the Book Festival were up 3% with more than 300 out of the 750 events being sold out before the festival started - Sean Connery's was sold out in under an hour. While the Tattoo sold out as usual, the process took longer this year and there were many more returns than in previous years, reportedly attributable to the reduction in the numbers of American visitors.

Fringe director resigns

Jon Morgan, the director of the Fringe, has dutifully fallen on his sword after this year's box office fiasco, according to early reports in the [Stage](#) and the [Scotsman](#). The Herald subsequently [puts its twopenneth in on the resignation](#) and [discusses the proposed investigations](#) into the debacle.

Fringe needs more money

A predictable call from a couple of venue chiefs for significantly [more money for the Fringe](#) and the creation of a chief executive role. An equally predictable response from the city council, "let us wait for the results of the reviews".

Edinburgh needs a new dawn ... oh no it doesn't ... oh yes it does ...

An article by [Norman Lebrecht in the Evening Standard](#) complains about Edinburgh's falling standards, mainly the EIF. While his criticisms warrant a response it needs to be somewhat more coherent than that offered by [Roger Cox in the Scotsman](#) (if you can read it - they appear to have made it a "premium article"). It may be a useful idea if the Scotsman allowed links to information on other sites so that, in this case, the reader could see what Lebrecht actually said. In fairness, the Scotsman stable produced a [slightly more dispassionate article](#) on this year's festival on the same day.

Fringe 2008 ticket sales down 10%

The Fringe has obviously put out a press release on the last day of the festival (25th August 2008). The [Guardian](#) and [Scotsman](#) both report that provisional figures show that Fringe 2008 ticket sales are down by approximately 10% on 2007. Book festival figures are reported to be up and International festival sales are said to be buoyant.

Other 2008 Fringe statistics include 18792 performers giving 31320 performances of 2088 shows at 247 venues.

All's well that ends well?!

Predictable mutterings that the festival has had as many bums on seats as ever before, despite the problems on the Fringe, are surfacing. The Observer has [one](#) and The Scotsman has two similar(ish) articles ... "[bumper Fringe brushes off setbacks](#)" and "[Fringe was all right on the night but what now?](#)". My own view, based on the shows that I have attended, is that there has been a slight decrease in punters over the last couple of years.

Assembly's Burdett-Coutts on Comedy and the Fringe

[Short article](#) in the Independent where Burdett-Coutts says that comedy is not killing the Fringe.

Fringe box office system nominated for comedy award

The Stage [reports](#) that the Fringe box office system has been nominated for the 2008 Malcolm Hardee award for "bringing surreal humour into the normally dull ticketing process". Alas, it did not win. The award went to [Edward Aczel](#).

Tattoo shows outside Edinburgh in 2009

The Scotsman [reports](#) that 4 Tattoo performances will be put on outside Edinburgh in 2009 as part of the Scottish Government's [Homecoming Scotland 2009](#) initiative, which encourages people with an affinity to Scotland to visit.

Heated Fringe AGM

Unsurprisingly given the problems this year, the Stage reports that [the Fringe AGM](#) (16th August 2008) was a heated affair with calls for apologies and the resignation of the board. As some punters suspected, the software supplier, Pivotal Engineering, has gone into administration. Three investigations will be commissioned into the box office fiasco: one IT specific into possible future options will be conducted by an external company (report due by the end of October); the Scottish Government, the Scottish Arts Council, the city council and Scottish Enterprise will all be invited to look at the overall problem, including the procurement, installation and operation of the system (report due in November); and finally a review of the role of the Fringe Society itself will be carried out. Meanwhile, the Scotsman reports that [the Fringe is considering legal action](#) over the fiasco.

Funding for Scottish talent at the Fringe

The Stage [details](#) an initial grant of £200,000 out of the Scottish Executive's Expo fund to aid Scottish talent that wish to appear at the Fringe. It is being branded "Made in Scotland". Companies must submit their applications by 17th November 2008. It is curious that the successful applicants will have been curated to appear in a festival that is uncurated! [Further details](#) can be found on the Scottish Executive web site.

More calls to split the festivals

[Rupert Christiansen](#) in the Telegraph follows Richard Demarco's call to stagger the dates of the International and Fringe festivals. Meanwhile, actor [Brian Cox](#) calls for the comedy festival to be split from the rest of the Fringe.

Festivals addressing carbon footprints

The Scotsman [reports](#) on how the festivals are addressing carbon footprints. For example, the EIF and the Book Festival are encouraging the use of the train rather than the plane for domestic journeys.

Assembly chief repeats threat to pull out

Burdett-Coutts, who runs Assembly, [has repeated his threat](#) to pull out of the Assembly Rooms if the proposed refurbishments go ahead after the 2010 Fringe. Jon Morgan, director of the Fringe, subsequently

expressed his hope that the Assembly Rooms will continue as a Fringe venue.

Fringe box office system postmortem - early skirmishes

The previous Fringe regime is to blame, according to [an article in EdinburghGuide.com](#). Meanwhile, Burdett-Coutts of Assembly [says in the Stage](#) that it is a big crisis - but it has brought us closer together - yawn. The Scotsman weighs in, [calling for an open postmortem](#) on the fiasco.

Fringe needs more TV coverage and public funding

Jon Morgan, director of the Fringe, [tells the Times](#) that the event needs more TV coverage and more public funding.

Spirit of the Fringe dying?

After a lull in the controversy over the Comedy Festival, the start of the Fringe brings a couple of articles in the [Times](#) and [Independent](#) on the subject of the Comedy Festival and the impact of the super venues. The [Guardian](#) hails the Forest Fringe as a potential saviour.

Figures Down?

On 1st August 2008 the Scotsman [reports](#) that accommodation bookings are still well done. This is variously blamed on the economy and the Fringe box office system problems. However, the Herald [says](#) that sales for the International Festival are very buoyant.

Is Edinburgh ready for the festival?

On 30th July 2008 the Scotsman [trotted out the range of problems](#): fringe box office, Usher Hall refurbishment, tram works, et cetera. Jonathan Mills, artistic director of the International Festival, [defended Edinburgh's festivals](#) the following day.

More Fringe booking system problems

The Scotsman [reports](#) (19th July 2008) that the Fringe is now experiencing problems with the printing of tickets. It claims that up to 150,000 tickets have not been printed with only two weeks to go to the start of the festival. The Fringe web site [contains some information](#) on this problem, promising an announcement this coming week (commencing 21st July 2008) on how punters who have purchased tickets can get their hands on them. It appears that posting them, as originally promised, is not now likely to be an option.

In addition, the Edinburgh Evening News [reported](#) (18th July 2008) instances of punters being charged multiple times for a ticket. There appear to be various claims: "authentication failed" messages leading to punters re-ordering but still being charged for the original attempted purchase; and very slow responses leading to people hitting the buy button several times.

I have fortunately managed to avoid this shambles of a system so far, booking with the venues.

21st July 2008 - Telephone and over the counter sales suspended yesterday and today.

22nd July 2008 - Telephone and over the counter sales to be resumed today [according to the Scotsman](#) but still no news on ticket production and distribution. The article includes a precis of the shambles so far.

23rd July 2008 - 27,000 tickets for preview week are being sent out today according to the [Scotsman](#). This still leaves an estimated 130,000 tickets outstanding and the Fringe box office still cannot issue paper tickets for new sales. NB - I noticed that the Fringe web site was not available first thing this morning although it was there when I checked again mid-morning.

24th July 2008 - more ticket collection points to be set up. But no details available on this. No postal bookings (as if anybody in their right mind would want to do this!).

25th July 2008 - the Fringe web site [says](#) that the main box office system will be closed on Sunday 27th July 2008 for telephone, counter sales and collections while the box office system that is used by the big four venues (which is unaffected by the Fringe ticketing problem) is installed at the following venues: C, Sweet, Universal Arts, St. Augustine's and the Vault. However, the Fringe web site will operate as normal. The statement also says that 100,000 tickets have now been sent out.

27th July 2008 - The Scotsman reports on how [the big four venues are helping out](#).

28th July 2008 - The Fringe are now saying that the box office system will also be closed today for telephone, counter sales and collections although the web site will be functioning. Sounds as if [some of the punters are getting restless](#).

29th July 2008 - the Fringe box office is open for collections but still closed for telephone and counter sales. Hurrah - [details of those venues](#) that have their own box office systems and so provide an alternative method of booking (albeit only for shows at those venues - except for the big 4 who share a system).

30th July 2008 - Fringe says that the box office will be open from 1000am today for telephone and counter sales. Other key news today is that: for bookings of shows at the big 4 (Assembly, Pleasance, Gilded Balloon and Underbelly) made after 6pm on Monday 28th July 2008 the tickets must be collected from the venues; tickets for shows on at Assembly @ Queen's Hall, Brunton Theatre, Meadows Theatre Big Top, Festival Theatre or the Playhouse must be obtained via the venues. No news that I can find as to whether the e-ticket tent will be operating as normal.

31st July 2008 - no further news from the Fringe although the Independent [reports](#) some problems with telephone and counter sales yesterday and the Scotsman [says](#) that opening weekend performances for 20 shows have been oversold.

1st August 2008 - it looks as if the e-ticket tent - where you can use PCs to book and then get your tickets printed - failed to open yesterday, as it was scheduled to do. I base this speculation on (a) the Fringe has failed to mention it anywhere; (b) they have failed to respond to my email on the subject; and (c) a comment in today's Scotsman "Organisers failed to open an extra Princes Street box office as planned yesterday". **Stop press** - I received an email response from the Fringe mid-morning ... the e-ticket tent is open today. I note that it has been added to the home page of the Fringe web site.

3rd August 2008. All appears to be relatively quiet. The press appears to be limited to articles such as "[I told you so](#)" in the Scotsman on Sunday and the director of Festivals Edinburgh, Faith Liddell, saying that [the new system is an investment](#) in the Sunday Herald. Sorry Madame Tsar, while I welcomed your appointment, please take it from somebody who has seen more than his fair share of unmitigated disasters in the IT world, this is a very long way from any sensible definition of the word investment!

4th August 2008 - EdinburghGuide.com has "[the real story](#)" of the whole sorry saga: it was all down to the previous Fringe regime it is alleged - sounds like half a story to me!

5th August 2008 - [Burdett-Coutts of Assembly puts his twopenneth in](#) in The Stage. No doubt there will be more contributors ... soon.

6th August 2008 - Overselling of some tickets rumbles on - the Scotsman tells of [children being turned away from a show](#).

Art Festival to receive £45K from Scottish Expo fund

Edinburghguide.com [reports](#) that the Art Festival is to receive £45K from the Scottish Government's Expo fund to install a new work by Scottish artist, Jim Lambie, at the Royal Botanical Gardens.

Financial problems surrounding proposed new Tattoo grandstand

The Times has [an article on the Military Tattoo](#), focusing on the financial problems of plans to install a new grandstand.

Tattoo ticket returns

The Scotsman [reports](#) that there will be many more ticket returns this year as the credit crunch bites and there is a decrease in the number of American visitors.

Threatened council workers' strike lifted

The Scotsman [reports](#) that fears of a threatened strike by council workers during the festival have been lifted, as negotiations will continue beyond this year's festival.

Amnesty International announce festival line-up

Amnesty International [announces](#) their festival line-up, the highlight being two comedy nights "Stand Up for Freedom" on the 6th and 13th August 2008 at the Assembly Hall.

BBC criticised for festival coverage

In what is becoming an annual event the BBC is rightly criticised for its poor festival coverage in [this article](#) in the Scotsman.

Edinburgh accommodation figures for festival down

According to the Scotsman, accommodation bookings for the festival are currently down, although ticket sales appear not to be.

Scottish Expo Fund money for Jazz & Blues Festival and International Festival

EdinburghGuide.com [reports](#) that the Jazz & Blues festival is to receive just under £50k from the Scottish Government's Edinburgh Festivals Expo Fund which was set up earlier this year to support Scottish involvement in the Edinburgh festivals. The International festival will receive £270K from the same fund.

Raj Persaud not to appear at the Book Festival

Psychiatrist Raj Persaud, who made his name on TV programmes such as This Morning with Richard and Judy, has unsurprisingly [withdrawn from the Book Festival](#). Persaud was recently suspended by the General Medical Council for plagiarism.

Emin to throw party to launch retrospective

The Scotsman [reports](#) that Tracey Emin is planning a big bash for the great and the good to launch her retrospective at the Scottish Gallery of Modern Art. My invite has not arrived yet, but I feel sure that it must be in the post.

PRS announce music for Fringe Sunday

The Performing Right Society has [announced](#) the music performers for [Fringe Sunday](#), which takes place on August 10th, 2008 this year at the Meadows.

Perceived squabble over who best to promote Edinburgh

The Scotsman [reckons](#) that there is a spat between the city council and [VisitScotland](#) over control of promoting Edinburgh. This appears to stem from the fact that the council has reduced its grant to VisitScotland by £125,000.

Richard Demarco says that "August is too busy"

The Observer [quotes](#) Richard Demarco, impresario and festival veteran, as saying that Edinburgh is obsessed with August when the city becomes overcrowded. He considers that other festivals, e.g. the Book Festival, should follow the lead of the Film Festival and move away from August.

Free Entertainment on the Mound to be "controlled"

The Mound is to be made an official area for free entertainment, run by the Fringe, during the festival, [according](#) to The Scotsman. Similar to the High Street, performers will need permits (£20 per week).

Early thoughts on Film Festival's move to June

The Scotsman [reports](#) on Saturday 28th June that figures are slightly up on last year (sales 3% and receipts 5%) and that the appearances of Sean Connery, Keira Knightley and Brian Cox have given the festival a boost. It is a bit too early to be drawing comparisons if you ask me, presumably it was written on Friday 27th several days before the end of the festival. Press coverage of the film festival overall seems lukewarm at best.

Home Office visa regulations relaxed for festival performers

As previously reported, the Home Office is to relax the visa rules for performers who are visiting the UK to appear in cultural events such as the festival. [eGov Monitor](#) explains. [This article](#) in the Times covers various visa changes.

Film Festival funding

The Herald reports towards the end of [this article](#) that the Film Festival is to receive £60K from the Scottish Parliament's new Expo fund for festivals.

Comedy "gang of 4" launches web site

<http://www.edcomfest.com/>

Book Festival box office busy on first day

The BBC web site [reports](#) that 10 of this year's events were sold out within hours of the box office opening to the public on June 20th, 2008. They include Sean Connery, Tony Benn and BBC journalist Alan Johnston.

Comedy "gang of 4" - City council reportedly joins the fray

The Scotsman [reports](#) that it has learnt that city councillors are considering cancelling leasing agreements with the Underbelly and Assembly Rooms from next year if the comedy festival is seen to damage the Fringe brand. The following day there is a [short Q&A](#) with Councillor Cardownie, the festivals and events champion.

Fringe box office system now available after problems

1025 on the 17th and it is all systems go ... [so they say](#). Cynics like me will let other punters act as guinea pigs for a day or two before daring to use it in anger. One point of note - tickets that you request to be posted to you will not be sent until mid-July. Update on 18th June 2008 - the system appeared to stay up yesterday from what I could see. Further update on 19th June 2008 - the Scotsman [voices criticisms](#) of the new system from smaller venues, along with indications that there are still some problems. On a personal note, I tried it last night on the web and on the first show that I tried to book I received a message that there were problems trying to allocate seats (or was that tickets?) .. please try again later. I gave up.

Fringe box office system problems

Chortle [reports](#) that the Fringe encountered problems with its new box office system on the first day that tickets were on sale to the public (9th June, 2008). Update from the Fringe web site on the 10th .. "All website, telephone and counter sales have been suspended until we are able to resolve the problems we are having with our computer system." At the risk of giving hints of my day job, I would bet a pint or two on inadequate testing.

12th June 2008 - Fringe say that the problems have now been resolved but they plan to do further testing today, and therefore they are delaying the availability of the system until tomorrow, Friday the 13th (oh dear!!).

Friday 13th and still no box office. Meanwhile, the Scotsman [claims](#) that the Fringe may revert to the old box office system if the problems continue.

1030am on Monday 16th June and the Fringe is confident that the system will be up and running manana (i.e. Tuesday 17th). 1700 same day and they are still confident.

Portrait Gallery restoration project

I managed to miss this item when it was originally announced just before Christmas 2007. [Portrait of a Nation](#) is a major redevelopment project that will double the gallery space and allow a 50% increase in the number of works on display. It is estimated that it will cost £17.6m with £4.8m coming from the Lottery and a £5.1m grant from the Scottish government. It is envisaged that the building will be closed to the

public from spring 2009 until autumn 2011.

Post Fringe programme launch ... and yet more on the comedy "gang of 4"

The Comedy Festival debate continues: Andrew Eaton ["fighting the good fight"](#) in the Scotsman; [Fringe 4 hit back](#) in Chortle; Jackie Clune in the Observer asks us [not to lose our sense of humour over the "comedy super league"](#); and Tommy Sheppard, director of the Stand comedy clubs [has a go](#) at the gang of 4.

Comedy Festival launches without a sponsor

The comedy gang of 4 [reckon](#) that there are 3 potential sponsors but nobody had signed up by the time of the launch.

Assembly threatens to pull out of Fringe by 2010

William Burdett-Coutts [threatens to withdraw](#) from the festival by 2010 if Edinburgh City Council go ahead with their plans to redevelop the Assembly Rooms in 2011. The plans will mean that Burdett-Coutts will lose 3 of the performing spaces and the bar

Pre Fringe programme launch gnashing of teeth

Mark Fisher in the Scotsman marks the imminent launch of the Fringe programme next week (5th June 2008) by asking [if the Fringe has lost its soul](#) (another version [appeared](#) several days later in the Guardian). At a rough guess this is only the first of several articles in the press that will appear on this theme between now and August. Meanwhile, a bit more sparring between the "evil comedy gang of 4" and its "enemies" can be found in the [Times](#) and [Sunday Herald](#). Comedian Doug Stanhope [makes a stand](#) (or possibly just pulls a stunt) against agents / promoters / venues, and Brian Hennigan also [has a go at the middle men](#) in the Scotsman. Brian Ferguson of the Scotsman [joins in](#) the debate.

Punter sought to become IE Comedy Awards Panellist

The Fringe web site indicates that a comedy punter is being sought to become a panellist for the Intelligent Finance Comedy Awards for 2008. If you are Scottish or have been resident in Scotland for at least 5 years - not to mention that you are interested in comedy - then [look here](#) for further details. Applications must be in by 2nd June 2008.

Usher Hall refurbishment delays

The Edinburgh Evening News [reports](#) that festival-goers will have to use portable loos at the Usher Hall during this year's festival, as delays continue with the overall refurbishment of the venue. [The current target date](#) for completion of the project is now April 2009. The Herald subsequently [detailed](#) the costs of these delays, principally compensation payments to orchestras for the loss of the venue.

Fringe to start earlier from 2009

The Scotsman [reports](#) that from 2009 the Fringe will be two days longer than normal. It will be following in the footsteps of the EIF by extending to take in the entire initial weekend. Seasoned punters will of course be aware that the Fringe has unofficially been starting before the weekend with some shows in preview from around Wednesday or Thursday in what is known as week 0. The Traverse theatre is a frequent early starter.

The Scotsman subsequently [gives next year's dates](#), Friday 7th August to Monday 31st August.

Royal Mile street performers to pay

The Scotsman [reports](#) that street acts will be charged £20 per week (or £50 for the whole feast) to perform in the popular High Street area during this year's festival. [More details](#) subsequently appeared on the Fringe web site.

Mid-May and a mini flurry of news from The Scotsman

The Scotsman reckons that: the comedy "gang of 4" are [struggling to get hold of a big name sponsor](#); the Spiegel Tent will be [forced to reduce the size of its venue](#); and that there are moves to [prevent the Meadows being used for this year's festival](#) (the City Council subsequently [gave the go-ahead](#) to two shows - The Lady Boys of Bangkok and the Chinese State Circus - but have commissioned a review into further use of the Meadows).

Aurora Nova will not be at the 2008 Fringe

A [news clip](#) in the Scotsman on the "Festivals Forum", a cross-festivals body that was recommended in the [Thundering Hooves report](#) of 2006, appears to indicate that funding issues will mean that the Aurora Nova venue, home of dance and physical theatre since 2001, will not operate at the 2008 Fringe. This is extremely bad news, if true. Several hours later - looks like [it is true](#).

The Stage subsequently [reports](#) the views of Aurora Nova founder and director, Wolfgang Hoffman, on 6th May, 2008.

New Immigration Rules not to Apply to Fringe Performers

The BBC (and others) [reports](#) that new immigration rules that would require performers to find a sponsor will not now apply to the Fringe after the Scottish Secretary, Des Browne, discussed the problem with the UK Immigration Minister, Liam Byrne.

Jon Morgan, Fringe director, [gives a cautious welcome](#) to the news in the Stage on 14th May 2008. It appears that the Fringe will be exempt because it is not regarded as a commercial venture.

Bad News on Arts Funding Merry-go-round

The Scottish Art Council has [announced](#) £7m worth of grants. The main winners are in the areas of experimental music and art, disabled companies plus newer dance and visual arts groups. Losers include the Edinburgh Jazz & Blues festival, the Queens Hall plus theatre companies Borderline, 7:84 and Suspect Culture.

Festivals Forum Chair Appointed

Susan Rice, Chief Executive of Lloyds TSB Scotland has been [appointed as chair of the Forum](#). The Forum is made up of senior executive and political representatives from Festivals Edinburgh, the Scottish Government, the City of Edinburgh Council, EventScotland, the Scottish Arts Council, Scottish Screen, Scottish Enterprise, VisitScotland and Edinburgh Tourism Action Group, was set up last year following a recommendation in the [Thundering Hooves report](#). (When clicking the links in this news item beware that the Scottish Arts Council web site can be very slow).

Time will tell if this forum will simply become another "talking shop", a political move to avoid coherent support and funding for the festivals.

More Concerns over Visas

The issue relating to the costs of the recent visa laws which was raised last year (see [2007 news snippets](#)) has been [brought up again](#) by the Fringe director, Jon Morgan, who fears that the international flavour of the Fringe may be affected, as non-EU performers become loath to pay to get visas.

Trouble finding sponsor for proposed Tracey Emin retrospective

... [according](#) to the Edinburgh Evening News.

First Moan about Film Festival moving to June?

... certainly the first that I can remember seeing - [Calum Waddell](#) in the Guardian. The commenters after

the blog seem to put him in the minority.

Yet more on "Comedy gang of four in cultural revolution ... "

The Herald uses the final moments before time is called (mid-April) on applications to perform at this year's Fringe to [produce a longer measured piece](#) on the controversy surrounding the introduction of the Edinburgh Comedy Festival by the gang of 4. See the previous entries on this topic below.

Major Outdoor Gigs unlikely at 2008 Festival

The Evening News [reports](#) that there are unlikely to be any major outdoor gigs in venues such as Princes Street Gardens or Meadowbank stadium at this year's festival.

Increased Funding for Film Festival

The International Film Festival is one of several newly defined Cultural Cinema Hubs in Scotland to be [awarded funds](#) by [Scottish Screen](#). It will receive £250,000 this year, an increase of £100,000 over last year.

No Visual Arts in 2008 International Festival

Having reintroduced the visual arts in 2007, it is being dropped again this year. Jonathan Mills, artistic director of the EIF, [blames](#) a lack of money but promises that it will be included every second year. This punter thinks that Brian McMaster, the previous artistic director, was right in his assertion that the Edinburgh Art Festival caters satisfactorily for the visual arts; it hosted an excellent programme in 2007. Mills should not waste his inadequate funds by competing in this area.

"Comedy gang of four in cultural revolution ... "

[says The Scotsman](#). Assembly, Pleasance, Underbelly and Gilded Balloon are planning to promote an Edinburgh Comedy Festival in 2008. As the shows will still be part of the Fringe, this appears to be a purely marketing device for the moment, one of the major aims being to attract sponsors. Naturally, smaller venues see this venture as a further move to marginalise them, while some critics speculate on the possibility of a breakaway from the Fringe as early as 2009. The Scotsman also [quotes some comedians](#), including Stewart Lee, who are unhappy with this idea. A [shorter, less colourful article](#) on this news can be found in The Stage.

More on "Comedy gang of four in cultural revolution ... "

The controversy surrounding the introduction of the Edinburgh Comedy Festival is gathering pace. Brian Logan, comedy reviewer for the Guardian, writes a thoughtful [blog](#) on the subject, lamenting the potential loss of "the spirit of the Fringe". The comments after the blog are also well worth reading.

The Edinburgh Evening News has got round to producing a [more measured article](#) than previously found in the Scotsman's stable.

Ah! the gang of four [speak](#) via Anthony Alderson, director of the Pleasance and spokesperson for the Edinburgh Comedy Festival.

David Lister at the Independent [weighs in](#) with us cynics.

Philanthropist to return to US over non-domicile tax

Carol Hogel, an American pianist turned philanthropist, is to return to the US [in protest](#) over the UK government's plans for a tax on non-domiciles. Hogel, who has lived in Scotland for the last 24 years, has reportedly gifted £20m to the arts over the years through her family charitable trust, the Dunard Fund. Beneficiaries have included the Edinburgh International Festival, the Scottish National Portrait Gallery and the The Scottish Chamber Orchestra.

£6m funding over 3 years for Scottish talent at the Festival

As [reported](#) in the Edinburgh Evening News, the Scottish Executive has [announced](#) the Edinburgh Festival Expo fund. £6m will be made available over three years to productions, artists or events that premiere at the festival and which feature Scottish-based talent.

BBC coverage of International Festival Criticised

The Herald [reports](#) that the Scottish Broadcasting Commission considers that broadcasting in Scotland lacks "ambition and imagination". Their interim report includes strong criticism from Jonathan Mills, artistic director of the International Festival, of the BBC's coverage of the event.

This punter would expand that criticism to the Beeb's coverage of the entire festival which has degenerated over the years.

Funding for Film Festival

The UK Film Council [has awarded the International Film Festival](#) £1.88m, spread over three years. This represents a 50% increase in the festival's funding. Official press release can be found [here](#).

George Square Theatre to Concentrate on Musicals at Fringe 2008

In a joint venture between The University of Edinburgh Festivals Office, the Pleasance, and Chris Grady, founder of the Musical Theatre Matters company, [The George Square Theatre will focus on musical shows](#) at the 2008 Fringe.

£125m Contemporary Art Collection Secured by National Galleries & Tate

The National Galleries of Scotland and the Tate [have obtained a collection of modern art works](#) from Anthony d'Offay, the art dealer, in a part gift / part sales agreement; they are paying the original cost price of £26.5m but the collection is currently estimated to be worth £125m. It includes works by Damien Hirst, Jeff Koons, Ron Mueck, Andy Warhol and Diane Arbus. [See the press release](#).

InvAsian at 2008 Fringe

[InvAsian](#) will provide an Asian cultural theme to the 2008 Fringe with acts from Japan, Korea, India, Pakistan and China. It will be based at the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh's Quincentenary Hall. InvAsian is the result of a partnership between production company clubWest and Tartan Silk Public Relations.

More Plaudits for Edinburgh and the Festival in Wanderlust Awards

[Wanderlust](#), a magazine for the independent-minded traveller, will announce its [awards](#) in the March 2008 edition. Luang Prabang in Laos has come first in the Best Cities category with Edinburgh in 10th place. The Rio de Janeiro carnival tops the Best Festival category with Edinburgh managing 3rd place for the "festival" and 6th place for the Fringe.

Demise of T on the Fringe

[T on the Fringe](#), a partnership between Tennents Lager and DF Concerts which has been bringing music gigs to the Fringe for the last eight years, [has been scrapped](#). Tennents Lager says that it has taken the format as far it could, while DF Concerts hope to continue the theme under a new name.

Study Commissioned to Look at Edinburgh's Cultural Needs

PMP, a UK-based consultancy firm, has been commissioned by The City of Edinburgh Council and Scottish Enterprise Edinburgh & Lothian (SEEL) to [review the requirement for cultural venues](#) in Edinburgh over the next 20 years. As well as looking at existing events the study will include events that do not currently visit the city due to a lack of appropriate venue space. The report is scheduled for delivery in Spring 2008.

This study follows on from [Thundering Hooves](#) which was commissioned in 2006 by the Scottish Arts

Council to compare Edinburgh's Festival against the global competition.

Squabbles Over Funding and Refurbishment

There are plans to refurbish the Assembly Rooms although the details relating to the precise scope of the work and the proposed dates appear to be somewhat fuzzy. William Burdett-Coutts, the artistic director of Assembly at festival time, had complained that he was not consulted. He was not happy with the idea of the refurbishment taking 18 months with the potential loss of the venue for one festival - in 2010 or 2011 depending on which date you believe - or with the potential loss of the ground floor to a restaurant and bar. It is unclear what the current position is.

The Queen's Hall and the King's Theatre, who both see themselves threatened with closure, have subsequently weighed in with their own requests for funding, coveting the money that is earmarked for the Assembly Rooms. The Queen's Hall made their initial play during the 2007 festival with the King's Theatre following suite in November 2007. See SaveTheKing's web site for recent information.

No doubt this squabbling is in part fanned by the media. We shall just await events.



An Edinburgh Festival Punter

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Pre-Festival Stuff for 2008

2006 2007 |

This page is in two sections. The first, by individual festival, contains links to early information, the actual programme launches along with initial feedback ...

[International Festival](#)
[Fringe](#)
[International Film Festival](#)
[Book Festival](#)
[Art Festival](#)
[Jazz & Blues Festival](#)

Second section - in the run up to the feast media recommendations often cover all the festivals. For that reason these picks along with links to specific preview articles are grouped together [here](#).

Edinburgh International Festival

The programme for the 2008 International Festival was announced on 2nd April 2008. Details can be found on the [eif web site](#) from where the brochure (4.7MB) can be downloaded.

Instant feedback which was quickly available within an hour of the launch from several media outlets can be found at the following links:

[Guardian](#)
[Stage](#)
[EdinburghGuide.com](#)
[List](#)
[Whatonstage](#)
[British Theatre Guide](#) (summary of drama, dance and opera productions).

Initial thoughts from some of the arts correspondents (and others) started to appear later the same day:

Pauline McLean, BBC Scotland, arts correspondent
Charlotte Higgins, Guardian arts correspondent
Brian Ferguson in the Scotsman
Keith Bruce, Arts Editor of the Herald
Andrew Eaton also in the Scotsman.

Joyce McMillan of the Scotsman subsequently weighed in with her views, particularly on the drama programme.

The artistic director's thoughts were expressed in a brief interview in the Scotland on Sunday.

Meanwhile, choreographer Matthew Bourne talked to the Sunday Times about his adaptation of Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray, a dance piece that most critics and punters are looking forward to.

The Scotsman has an interview with Vicky Featherstone, artistic director of the National Theatre of Scotland, which includes mention of their forthcoming production of 365: One Night to Learn a Lifetime.

The punters that I have spoken to so far have hardly been ecstatic about the festival programme, "Artists Without Borders". This is the problem with a theme: punters fear that balance is being sacrificed while a device is done to death in the name of art. It is a risky commercial strategy, no doubt in part driven by financial constraints, but we shall see what August brings.

Opera and music punters seem particularly upset, with some identifying what they perceive to be a continuation of a gradual slide in both the quality and size of the programme: there was a letter in the Scotsman complaining about themes plus the reduction in the number of opera productions and the choice this year (followed by a brief defence of Mills from another reader several days later - link also since removed); while my friend and fellow punter Susan seemed somewhat underwhelmed when she first saw the programme. She talks of a lack of excitement and anticipation this year, something which she has never experienced before. One of the delights of her trips to Edinburgh, which is missing this year, has been to see and hear new up and coming performers such as Jonas Kaufman who is now singing with the Metropolitan Opera. Susan is also very disappointed at the lack of concert operas this year. Overall, it sounds as if Jonathan Mills is not her favourite person right now and she is very concerned for the future of classical music at the EIF. Nevertheless, she highlights the following: Dmitri Hvorostovsky, the Finnish Radio Symphony with Karita Mattila, the Belcea Quartet and Helene Grimaud, Herrewege, Susan Bullock, the Monteverdi Choir, Les Artes Florissant/Anne Sophie Von Otter, and the Budapest Festival Orchestra.

Our highlight of the festival, not part of the theme (at least I do not think so?!), is in the dance programme where Matthew Bourne, the renowned and popular choreographer, is adapting Oscar Wilde's Dorian Gray. Otherwise, the dance programme is not particularly inspiring.

The drama programme seems a bit of a mixed bag to me. I expect that the EIF hopes that the marriage of David Harrower, writer of the 2005 hit Blackbird, and the National Theatre of Scotland, with their 2006 Fringe blockbuster Blackwatch, will forge another success with Harrower's new work, 365: One Night to Learn a Lifetime. My innate cynicism makes me wonder; I hope that I am wrong. Meanwhile, TR Warszawa's productions of Dybbuk and Sarah Kane's 4.48 Psychosis may both be worth a view.

Previews from July onwards are [here](#).

Edinburgh Fringe

Pre Fringe Programme Launch

If you hunger for the days when money seemed less important than the art, when the Fringe had an enormous soul, then read Andy Field's [impassioned blog](#) about the [Forest venue](#) and its plans for 2008 ... "We're not going to be part of the official fringe. We're not going to charge artists anything to perform. All shows are going to be 'pay what you can' . We're going to have to a wonderful mix of established fringe veterans and younger artists who've never performed at the venue before ... We want to create a venue that cherishes the idea that you can go up to Edinburgh with barely more than a good idea. A place that doesn't bleed you dry; that doesn't demand three weeks of performances on the off chance that the Guardian will like your show ... We have a church hall, a cafe, some black-out curtains and a couple of

lanterns and we're going to change the world." Good luck Andy.

As mentioned in the [news snippets](#), there will be no Aurora Nova this year - this is very bad news.

Lyn Gardner of The Guardian [discusses](#) the loss of Aurora Nova and the hopes for the [Forest venue](#) (21st May 2008).

Some advance news on the Fringe programme (last updated on 5th June 2008 just hours before the official programme launch):

- Advance note via quote from National Theatre of Scotland press release: "The National Theatre of Scotland: New Work will join forces with the Team (USA) to present the world premiere of *Architecting* at the Traverse as part of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe (31 July to 24 August at Traverse 2)."
- Good news for Dance and Physical Theatre fans: Derevo's web site indicates that it will be performing *The Gospel of Anton* at the Pleasance
- [The Free Edinburgh Fringe](#) (the Laughing Horse version) has announced its programme. There will be 157 shows spread across 8 venues. Comedy is still the main focus although there will be more theatre and music than in 2007
- Guy Masterson productions at Assembly will include *Scaramouche Jones*, *Weights*, *Vincent*, *Absolution* and *Yasser*
- Scottish Opera is appearing at the Fringe for the first time in its history, performing Rossini's *Cinderella* at Assembly
- Steven Berkoff is directing a production of *On The Waterfront* at the Pleasance
- The Scotsman includes the above two items plus some other advance news in [this article](#)
- [final advance news](#) just hours before the official launch in the Scotsman, including a list of comedians who will be operating under the Comedy Festival umbrella.

Fringe Programme Launch

The Fringe [announces](#) the programme while the Guardian's take on the launch itself can be found [here](#).

Initial views on the programme started to surface within hours of the launch. However, unless the journalists concerned have had the luxury of advance copies it seems likely that it will be some time before more considered views will be available. However, until then here are a selection of those initial views:

- [Mark Fisher](#) in the Guardian
- [The Stage](#)
- [WhatsonStage.com](#)
- [The Times](#)
- [Scotsman](#)
- [Brian Logan's](#) initial thoughts in the Guardian
- [Independent's](#) focus on the wackier shows.

The Stage [notes](#) that for the first time in the Fringe's history there will be more comedy shows than drama productions.

Meanwhile, Andy Field, involved with the [Forest Fringe](#), continues his [criticism of the Fringe ethos](#).

Somewhat earlier than usual, the Traverse festival brochure [is now available](#), providing much more detail than the terse descriptions in the Fringe programme. [This article](#) in the Scotsman covers the launch, focusing on Philip Ralph's play *Deep Cut*.

We have eventually managed to wade through the programme brochure. I have to say that it did not really excite me, but perhaps I am still in mourning over the loss of Aurora Nova. Here are our initial thoughts:

- Drama - the Traverse has a strong line-up on paper of performing companies this year (let us hope that the plays and productions are equally compelling); we will be seeing the majority of them. Guy Masterson is producing 6 shows at the Assembly Rooms and we shall probably take in a couple of them, favourite at the moment is *Absolution* with Owen O'Neill. Other current possibilities include Pip Utton in *War of the Worlds* (one man show stalwart), *The Terrible Infants* (Les Enfants Terribles -

- shortlisted for Best Emerging Company last year) and the *Aluminum Show*
- Dance - Derevo's *Gospel of Anton* and the Scottish Dance Theatre's double bill of *tenderhook* and *DOG*
- Comedy - Daniel Kitson's *66a Church Road*, Jerry Sadowitz with his *Comedian, Magician, Psychopath II*, and we may give both Reginald D. Hunter and Ed Byrne a whirl. Also among the possibles is Stewart Lee's *Elizabeth and Raleigh: Late but Live* with Miles Jupp and Simon Munnery (a follow up to *Johnson and Boswell* that this team did last year).

The Forest Fringe, an independent venue which aims to help aspiring performers that I had [previously mentioned](#) has launched its programme on its [web site](#).

Re contemporary music, the programme for the Edge Festival, the successor to T on the Fringe, can be found [here](#). The individual shows can also be located in the Fringe programme.

Previews from July onwards are [here](#).

International Film Festival

Prior to the programme launch on 7th May 2008, periodic pre-announcements were made, as detailed in the following paragraphs.

EIFF has [announced](#) that John Maybury's Dylan Thomas biopic THE EDGE OF LOVE will be the Opening Gala at the festival. It stars Keira Knightley, Sienna Miller and Matthew Rhys and will subsequently open in London on 20th June 2008 before its nationwide release on 27th June 2008. The full programme is due to be launched on 7th May 2008.

[Early news](#) indicates that retrospectives are being planned on actresses [Jeanne Moreau](#) and [Shirley Clarke](#).

[More news of the 2008 programme](#) seeping out in the Edinburgh Evening News - premiere of The Stone of Destiny, starring Billy Boyd and Robert Carlyle. The article also includes news of the documentaries that will be showing. EdinburghGuide.com now [contains slightly more information](#) on the documentaries.

The drip-feed continues with the announcement of the "Under The Radar" section, as [detailed](#) in the Scotsman; it is devoted to low-budget, independent, offbeat and unpredictable features.

This drip-feed of announcements eventually finished with the full programme launch on 7th May 2008. See the [Film Festival web site](#) for full details.

An [early summary](#) of the programme appeared within hours in the Edinburgh Evening News, with a [more detailed summary](#) the following day in EdinburghGuide.com.

Alistair Harkness, Scotsman's film critic, offers his [pick](#) of the EIFF 2008 programme.

[Interview](#) with Hannah McGill, director of the Film Festival, in the Edinburgh Evening News.

[BBC Film network](#) has a detailed preview.

As the festival approaches a number of critics give their picks:

- [Sheila Johnston](#) in the Telegraph
- [Peter Bradshaw](#) in the Guardian
- [Siobahn Synnot](#) in Scotland on Sunday
- [Chitra Ramaswamy](#) in Scotland on Sunday.

Edinburgh International Book Festival

The details of the RBS Schools programme are already available. They can be [downloaded from this page](#).

The full 2008 programme has now been [launched](#) (12th June 2008). The programme brochure can be downloaded from [the web site](#). Public booking will commence on 20th June 2008. This year's stats include

800 authors participating in over 750 events.

[The List](#) was first out of the blocks with a summary of the launch, closely followed by the [Edinburgh Evening News](#), while David Robinson, Book Editor of the Scotsman, [nominates his top ten events](#). Sean Connery commands the majority of the early headlines; he will be discussing his memoirs, *Being A Scot*, which will be launched during the festival. Ian Rankin grabs the remaining early headlines with news that he will be [launching a comedy thriller](#) at the festival.

Previews from July onwards are [here](#).

Edinburgh Art Festival

The programme was launched today (June 26th, 2008). Within hours there was a [brief article](#) in the Scotsman which focused on the Tracey Emin retrospective and some of the public installations. It was followed the next day by articles in the [Times](#), [Scotsman](#) and [Herald](#).

However, no sign of information on the Art Festival web site just yet - they are now saying mid-July. Pending that here are some of the exhibitions that will undoubtedly form part of the festival plus some snippets gleaned from the above mentioned articles:

[Vanity Fair Portraits](#) and [Heroes](#) - both at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery

[Impressionism and Scotland](#) - National Gallery Complex

[Tracey Emin 20 Years, Collage City](#) and [FOTO | Modernity in Central Europe, 1918-1945](#) - Scottish Gallery of Modern Art.

[Richard Wilson at the Grey Gallery](#)

Installations by the Canadian artists, Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller - Fruitmarket Gallery

Various public installations, including the Billboard for Edinburgh project - Waterloo Place/Calton Road (end wall of the [new Ingelby Gallery](#)).

[Reviews](#) of some of the major exhibitions have already started to appear.

Hurrah - the programme eventually makes it onto [their web site](#).

Previews from July onwards are [here](#).

Edinburgh Jazz & Blues Festival

The programme has now been fully launched on the [web site](#) (12th June 2008) from where the brochure can be downloaded. Tickets are on sale.

Picks and Previews

The date in brackets alongside each of the following entries indicates when the item was added to this page, which is not necessarily the day that the linked article was actually first published.

The Scotsman has produced the first set of detailed recommendations with its [60 hottest shows](#) (13th June 2008) - pretty impressive as some of us were still ploughing through the programme brochure while others had not even got their grubby hands on a copy.

The Times follows with its [50 shows that it would be a crime to miss](#) (23rd June 2008).

Lyn Gardner of the Guardian [brings her expert eye](#) to the Fringe programme (7th July 2008) - a must read for punters.

Scottish bloggers, [viewfromthestalls](#), come up with their [initial selection](#) of shows (8th July 2008).

The Times has an [article](#) on [Lynn Ruth Miller](#), a 75 year old "stripper" from San Francisco who is appearing at the Fringe in two shows: [Aging is Amazing](#) and [Granny's Gone Wild](#) - it's comedy with an anti-ageist theme (11th July 2008).

EdinburghGuide.com has a [3 minute video interview](#) with Jon Morgan, director of the Fringe (11th July 2008)

EdinburghGuide.com highlights what it calls "[blasts from the past](#)", viz. shows featuring the likes of Britt Ekland, Joan Rivers, Michael Barrymore *et cetera* (11th July 2008)

EdinburghGuide.com produces its [book festival picks](#) (11th July 2008).

Tracey Emin retrospective: [interview](#) in the Scotsman and [news](#) that under 16s will need to be accompanied by adults (12th July 2008); [another interview](#) - this one in the Times (16th July 2008).

[Article in the Sunday Times](#) on Chad McCail who will have a small exhibition at the Edinburgh Printmakers Gallery (13th July 2008).

The Guardian has launched its [Edinburgh 2008](#) section. It includes picks on [comedy](#), [classical & opera](#), [art](#), [dance](#), [EIF theatre](#) and [Fringe theatre](#) (14th July 2008).

The Times [previews](#) the Impressionism and Scotland exhibition (14th July 2008), as does [the List](#) three days later (17th July 2008).

[Brief interview](#) in the Edinburgh Evening News with Mike Hart, founder of the Jazz & Blues festival (14th July 2008).

[Preview](#) in the Herald of Karol Szymanowski's opera [King Roger](#) which is on at the International Festival (16th July 2008).

[Interview](#) in the Herald with Jonathan Miller, artistic director of the International festival, focusing on elements of the drama programme with specific reference to [Dybbuk](#) (16th July 2008).

Latest edition of the List includes [previews](#) of [Fall](#) and [Pornography](#), both being performed by the Traverse Theatre Co., and an interview with Jackie Wylie, new artistic director of the Arches who will be performing [Finished with Engines](#) at the Traverse (17th July 2008).

Somewhat belatedly, the Art festival programme has made it onto [their web site](#) (17th July 2008).

The Telegraph gives its "[100 reasons to go to Edinburgh](#)", i.e. its show recommendations (19th July 2008).

The Herald [recommends](#) 5 gigs at the Jazz and Blues festival (22nd July 2008).

[Preview](#) of the Art festival in EdinburghGuide.com (22nd July 2008).

[Previews](#) in the List of [Matthew Bourne's Dorian Gray](#), [4:48 Psychosis](#) and others (22nd July 2008).

Also in the List, previews for [classical music](#) and [opera](#) (both at the International festival) and for [the Jazz and Blues festival](#) (22nd July 2008).

[Interview](#) with Matthew Bourne re Dorian Gray production in the Independent (23rd July 2008).

The Herald [previews](#) Prokofiev's seven symphonies which are being performed at the International festival (23rd July 2008).

Off beat - the Guardian [talks to Mr. Methane](#), the world's only professional flatulist, who will be appearing on the Fringe (23rd July 2008).

EdinburghGuide.com [previews](#) the Military Tattoo programme (23rd July 2008).

[Preview](#) of Dublin's Abbey Theatre production of Terminus at the Traverse in the Herald (24th July 2008).

Samford Wurmfeld's E-Cyclorama has attracted media attention, e.g. in [Art Daily](#) and [this BBC video clip](#)

(24th July 2008).

[Previews](#) in the New Statesman (24th July 2008).

The BBC has a [brief history of the Jazz & Blues festival](#) which opens tomorrow (24th July 2008).

The Herald [previews](#) the art festival (25th July 2008).

One of those articles - is it a preview or a review? - on [Impressionism & Scotland](#) in the Metro (25th July 2008).

The Times' Edinburgh [preview page](#) (26th July 2008).

The Observer [talks about the Edinburgh art scene](#), including the new Ingelby gallery (27th July 2008).

The Sunday Times [highlights the views](#) of individuals concerning the new Comedy Festival (27th July 2008).

The Independent on Sunday [produces its list of names to look out for](#) (27th July 2008).

[Preview of Deep Cut](#) (which is on at the Traverse) in the Sunday Times (27th July 2008).

Article in the Scotsman on [Irish theatre productions](#) (28th July 2008).

[Interview with Jonathan Mills](#), director of the International Festival, in the Skinny (29th July 2008).

Article in the Herald on [A Drunk Woman Looks at the Thistle](#) which is on at the Assembly Rooms (29th July 2008).

Article in the Times on Venezuelan pianist [Gabriela Montero](#) (29th July 2008).

This year's winner in the "my Edinburgh festival experiences" class looks as if it will be won by [Richard Morrison](#) in the Times (30th July 2008).

[Interview with National Theatre of Scotland](#) in the Skinny (30th July 2008).

The Telegraph [previews Pornography](#) which is on at the Traverse (31st July 2008).

[Latest set of previews from the List](#), including the InvAsian festival and Berkoff's On The Waterfront (31st July 2008).

[Theatre preview](#) in WhatsOnStage.com (1st August 2008).

A comedy preview day: Brian Logan's [Comedy Survival Guide](#) in the Guardian and [The Rise of Britcom](#) in the Independent (1st August 2008).

Ian Shuttleworth of the FT does [a sort of preview on comedy](#) - I think? (2nd August 2008).

The Sunday Times belatedly comes up with its [20 best things to see](#) (3rd August 2008).

The Herald [previews the Fringe](#) from a venue perspective (4th August 2008).

Edinburgh Evening News [previews the magicians](#) at this year's Fringe (6th August 2008).

The Guardian is giving a good plug for [Forest Fringe](#) with this article by Lyn Gardner (7th August 2008). For more info [see above](#).



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Info on Reviews of Shows at the 2008 Festival

2007 | 2006

The main objectives of this page are to:

- tell you where you can find reviews on the web
- provide a summary of those shows which have scored most marks with the critics
- detail some of this year's awards
- provide links to selected Visual Arts, Jazz & Blues and Film festival reviews.

Where to Find 2008 Reviews

There are a plethora of sources to satisfy even the most voracious consumer of reviews. Of course the critics vary from the professional to the semi-pro, the student, the enthusiastic theatregoer ... and all shades in between.

[Scotsman](#)

[Guardian](#)

[Times](#)

[Herald International Festival and Fringe](#)

[EdinburghGuide.com](#)

[Chortle \(comedy\)](#)

[FringeReview](#)

[Independent](#)

[BroadwayBaby](#)

[Fest](#)

[OnstageScotland](#)

[The Stage](#)

[BritishTheatreGuide](#)

[The List](#)

[Edinburgh Festivals Magazine](#)

[Blog - viewfromthestalls](#)

[ThreeWeeks](#)

Most Critically Acclaimed Shows

Let me start off by stating the obvious: there are many enjoyable shows which never make these lists. We have seen many "minor classics" in Edinburgh over the years that went largely unnoticed by the critics. Indeed, we have a number of shows in our planned schedule for this year that have had little publicity during the "preview season". So, do not be a complete slave to reviews: listen to the "word on the street" and perhaps try something different – you might be pleasantly surprised.

The minimum requirement to get onto the following lists is that a show must have had a minimum of three reviews ... which is not easy.

The lists reflected the state of play on Thursday morning, 21st August 2008. One further entry was added on Thursday 28th August 2008 - the opera *Krol Roger*.

Theatre (Drama & Musicals): *Once and for all we are going to tell you who we are so shut up and listen*, *4:48 Psychosis*, *Scaramouche Jones*, *Aluminum Show*, *New Electric Ballroom*, *Architecting*, *Deep Cut*, *Nocturne*, *Free Outgoing*, *Footsbarn's Midsummer Night's Dream*, *A Drunk Woman Looks at the Thistle*, *The Tailor of Inverness*, *The Vanishing Point*, *The Idiot Colony*, *On the Waterfront*, *Weights*, *Auditorium*, *In*

a Thousand pieces, Faulty Towers and the Dining Experience, Lie of the Land, Motherland, Crocosmia, Stefan Golaszewski Speaks about a Girl He Once Loved and Simon Callow - A Festival Dickens.

Comedy: *La Clique, 66a Church Road, Rhod Gilbert, David O'Doherty, Jason Byrne, Amsterdam Underground Comedy Collective Presents Hans Teeuwen/Micha Wertheim, Jamie Kilstein, Russell Kane, Alun Cochrane, Richard Herring, Kristen Schaal and Kurt Braunohler, Idiots of Ants 2008, Ed Byrne, Jimeon on Ice, Lady Garden, Aeneas Faversham, Office Party, Pajama Men: Versus vs Versus, Ivan Brackenberry, John Pinette, Andrew Maxwell, Jon Richardson, John Gordillo and Frank Woodley.*

Dance & Physical Theatre: *Bale de Rua, Holdin Fast, Todos los Gatos son Pardos, Scottish Dance Theatre and Caesar Twins.*

Music and Opera: *Krol Roger, Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra and Chant Wars.*

2008 Awards

There is an ever-growing number of awards at the festival.

The Scotsman Fringe First awards for new writing. The winners are announced during each week of the Fringe. The week one winners were: Enda Walsh's *New Electric Ballroom*, Sherman Cymru's *Deep Cut, Architecting, Stefan Golaszewski Speaks About a Girl He Once Loved and The Tailor of Inverness*. The week two winners were: Daniel Kitson's *66a Church Road*, Mark O'Rowle's *Terminus, The Caravan, Itsoseng, In a Thousand Pieces, Paperweight, Eight and Motherland*. Final week 3 winners: *Crocosmia, In Conflict, Once And For All We're Gonna Tell You Who We Are So Shut Up And Listen, Slick and The Idiot Colony*.

The Glasgow Herald Angel awards are also announced weekly during the festival. Week 1: the Archangel award to Enda Walsh's *New Electric Ballroom*; Angel awards to Sherman Cymru's *Deep Cut*, Adam Rapp's *Nocturne, Enclosure 44 - Humans, Bale de Rua, Dream of Cat* and the Richard Hamilton exhibition at Inverleith House. Week 2: the Archangel award to Bill Kyle (Jazz Bar); Angel awards to *Once and for all we are going to tell you who we are so shut up and listen*, The African Children's Choir, The State Ballet of Georgia, Song and Civilization series of concerts in Greyfriars Kirk, Polish performer Magdalena Cielecka (in *Dybbuk* and *4:48 Psychosis*) and Scottish Opera (for *The Two Widows*). Week 3: Archangel award to Zoo Southside for dance and physical theatre; Rosas; Roby Lakatos; *Looking at Tazieh; The Fooligan; My Friend the Chocolate Cake*; and Forest Fringe. Week 4: Archangel award to Eileen O'Reilly (Fringe liaison officer); Fiona Bradley (director of the Fruitmarket Gallery); Susie Honeyman (curator from the Grey Gallery); Matthew Bourne; conductor Valerie Gergiev; and Ivan Fisher and the Budapest Festival Orchestra.

Intelligent Finance's if.comedy awards (which replaced the Perrier awards in 2006): David O'Doherty (main award) and Sarah Millican (best newcomer).

The Stage Awards for Acting Excellence at the Fringe: Ciaran McIntyre for *Deep Cut* (best actor); Rhian Blythe for *Deep Cut* (best actress); Live Theatre for *Motherland* (best ensemble); and Matthew Zajac for *The Tailor of Inverness* (best solo performer).

The Carol Tambor Edinburgh to New York award: Edinburgh University Theatre Company for *Eight*.

Amnesty International's Freedom of Expression award: *Deep Cut*

Total Theatre awards: Ontroerend Goed, Kopergiettery & Richard Jordon Productions at Traverse Theatre for *Once and For All We're Gonna Tell You Who We Are So Shut Up and Listen* (experimentation and innovation); Little Bulb Theatre for *Crocosmia* (graduate company); Puppet State Theatre Company for *The Man Who Planted Trees* (story theatre); Redcape Theatre for *The Idiot Colony* (visual theatre); THE TEAM and National Theatre of Scotland Workshop for *Architecting* (young company); and Footsbarn Touring Theatre (significant contribution to physical and visual Theatre).

Edinburgh International Festival (EIF) award: Belt Up.

Arches Brick award for emerging talent: Little Bulb Theatre for *Crocosmia* and Paper Cinema and Kora

for *The Night Flyer*.

FringeReview awards for outstanding theatre shows. Lynn Manning for *Weights* and the cast of *Office Party*.

Jack Tinker Spirit of the Fringe award. Award shared by The World@St. George's West venue and *Motherland*.

Holden Street award: *The Tailor of Inverness*.

Other awards include: Malcolm Hardee award for comedy, Edinburgh Evening News drama awards, Three Weeks editor's awards and Allen Wright award for young journalists.

Art Festival

Foto: Modernity in Central Europe 1918-1945 gets very good reviews in the [Guardian](#), [Times](#), [FT](#) and [The List](#).

Vanity Fair Portraits: Photographs 1913-2008 reviews can be found in the [Scotsman](#) and [The List](#).

Impressionism and Scotland: a very brief review has appeared in the [Scotsman](#) (21st July 2008), followed by a longer piece in [Scotland on Sunday](#) (27th July 2008). A solid review appeared in the [FT](#) (2nd August 2008) which was belatedly followed by one in the [Telegraph](#) (19th August 2008).

Tracey Emin: 20 years. Several pseudo-reviews floating around in the [Times](#), [Guardian](#), [Scotland on Sunday](#) and [Independent](#).

Jazz & Blues Festival

Selected reviews:

Swing 2008 with Bob Barnard in the [Herald](#).
Stan Tracey Trio and Bobby Wellins in the [Herald](#).
Little Feat in the [Herald](#).
John Gill's King Oliver Creole Band in the [Herald](#).
David Murray Black Saint Quartet in the [Herald](#).
Dizzy Gillespie All-Stars in the [Herald](#).
Barbara Morrison in the [Herald](#).
Lee Ritenour in the [Scotsman](#).

Film Festival

The first review of the much publicised *The Edge of Love* can be found in the [Times](#). Further reviews followed in the [Scotsman](#), [Guardian](#), [Telegraph](#), [Independent](#) and [the List](#).

Reviews of *Stone of Destiny* first appeared in [EdinburghGuide.com](#) and [the Herald](#). Alistair Harkness in the [Scotsman](#) subsequently appeared not to like it!

Some places to look for reviews:

[EdinburghGuide.com](#) (explicit section on film festival including news and blogs)
[Scotsman](#) (selected reviews) ... and here ... round-up of documentaries ... and more here
[Future Movies](#)
[Den of Geek](#)
[Blogcritics.org](#)
[the List](#)
[Times](#)
[Guardian](#) ... and film weekly blog and podcast

Telegraph

The finish of the festival brought a number of articles on the themes that (a) the move to June had been a good idea and (b) it had been a good festival: [Scotsman](#), [Telegraph](#) and [Herald](#). Shame that the mainstream media in general did not accord the festival many column inches apart from predictably going overboard about Keira Knightley and Sienna Miller, stars of [The Edge of Love](#), a film which the punters did not seem enamoured of.

Alistair Harkness in the Scotsman [produced](#) a more dispassionate view of the festival. This was followed by a review in [Time Out](#).

[Awards](#) included: the Michael Powell award for best British feature film to director Shane Meadows for [Somers Town](#); PPG award for best performance in a British feature film to Robert Carlyle for [Summer](#); best documentary award to Werner Herzog for [Encounters at the End of the World](#); and the Standard Life Audience award to [Man on Wire](#) (director James Marsh).



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Punters' Visit to the 2008 Edinburgh Festival

I was somewhat apprehensive as we set off this year: the Fringe box office fiasco and the disappearance of the Aurora Nova venue had made me slightly downbeat. My mood was not helped by a dire train journey from Kings Cross to Edinburgh, due to some kind thieves stealing signalling cable (for the copper) somewhere between Newark and Grantham. The upshot was an absolutely packed train with many passengers having to stand or perch somewhere. Janet was however determined that we would have our traditional "we are off to Edinburgh G+T" and she managed to get to the buffet after York when the train was very slightly less packed. Amazingly we were only 45 minutes late getting into Edinburgh; some fellow passengers were 4+ hours late due to train cancellations. After quickly unpacking, chatting to Penny, the delightful lady who runs the B&B, and a brief visit to the Sibbets where we used to stay (they are now retired), we were off ...

Day 1

First up was [Absolution](#), a one man piece with Owen O'Neill, a Fringe regular both as comedian and straight actor. It was a story, set in Ireland, of a man who killed Catholic priests that were guilty of abusing children. It was an enjoyable show with an interesting twist at the end. The evening meal was followed by a walk to the Traverse to see [Finished With Engines](#). Although the show had received quite reasonable reviews, we found it somewhat uninspiring and totally failed to understand how one critic had managed to equate it with M.A.S.H.

Day 2

Day 2 started with breakfast at the B&B. It transpired that all the other guests this year were in Edinburgh at least in part for the festival. Our first show of the day was [Fall](#) at the Traverse, a play which deals with the aftermath of a civil war and the issues which surround how to deal with war criminals. We enjoyed the play and the performance of the actors although the script did tend to ramble somewhat after the interval.

This was followed by the Royal Court's production, [Free Outgoing](#), a tale of social stigma in India with a decidedly 21st century take. It was very thought-provoking, well paced and had strong performances from the cast, particularly from Lolita Chakrabarti who played the mother.

Staying in the Traverse, we suffered *Nocturne*, a somewhat turgid monologue which lasted just under 2 hours. I found the descriptive passages way way too long and I am afraid that I lost the will to live around the one hour mark. I am sure that it would be possible to reduce the script by virtually 50% without losing any artistic content. You may wish to take my comments with a slight pinch of salt as I have been known to say (somewhat sacrilegiously) that a small number of Shakespeare's plays could do with a little trim, albeit in the bard's case I am just talking about certain final acts going on a bit too long!

Our Traverse day was completed with *Architecting*, a play which dealt with how people react to change. It was performed by the Team, a young US company. They were certainly very energetic performers but I found the play, albeit complex, somewhat naïve in the terms of the views expressed ... but enjoyable all the same.

Day 3

Monday morning sees our first cancelled show for several years. Derevo's *Gospel of Anton* had bitten the dust when the main dancer had broken his knee several weeks previously. However, we did not find out until we arrived at the Pleasance. One of my gripes about the Fringe is that they (and the venues) are not very good at highlighting cancelled shows - one for their suggestion boxes possibly although the Fringe's suggestion box is probably somewhat overloaded at this precise moment.

A quick piece of re-scheduling took us to the National Galleries to see the *Impressionism and Scotland* art exhibition. It put the Glasgow school and Scottish Colourists alongside the Impressionists. Some critics have complained that the exhibition lacks coherence, merely pandering to the tastes of the average punter who likes the Impressionists - hey ho, perhaps I am just your average punter ... although in my defence I do like the Scottish Colourists as well! Enjoyable.

After a quick visit to The Cumberland, one of our favourite Edinburgh pubs, we were off to Baby Belly to see Pip Utton's *War of the Worlds*. While we are fans of Utton this was a disappointing and somewhat lacklustre show.

Back to the Pleasance for our two remaining shows of the day. *The Aluminum Show* was very entertaining and inventive, suitable for all the family. *Reginald D. Hunter* was also reasonably entertaining. He courts controversy but generally manages to get away with it by convincing you that he is an intelligent chap rather than somebody who simply rants for the sake of it.

Day 4

Tuesday started with a trip to the Traverse to see the Abbey Theatre's production of *Terminus*. Seemingly disparate monologues from three actors until you gradually realise that they are interconnected, with magical aspects that seem to be part and parcel of much Irish drama these days. This was a good all-round show.

Off to the Assembly Rooms for *Weights*, another of Guy Masterson's productions at this year's Fringe. It is autobiographical, written and played by Lynn Manning. It deals with his troubled childhood, being shot and blinded in a bar in LA, and dealing with his blindness. A solid performance.

Back to the Traverse for *Pornography*, a play dealing with disparate Londoners at the time of 7/7 bombing. We struggled with this play, not least because all the Londoners portrayed were odd-balls. I am sure that there is a play to be written around 7/7 but this is not it.

The final show of the day was *Deep Cut* at the Traverse. It has been the subject of considerable media hype, much of it claiming that the theatre can do what journalists have failed to do with respect to learning the truth about what did or did not happen at the Deepcut barracks. Viewing it simply as a piece of theatre we (no doubt in the minority) did not find it to be a particularly powerful piece. It had an overtly sentimental streak which detracted from the verbatim elements of the show. We saw *The Exonerated* at the Fringe several years ago, a verbatim theatre piece about innocent people on death row in the US. We got the impression at the time that it was mostly pure transcript, and the sheer harshness of it made it very moving. *Deep Cut* simply did not have that effect on us.

Day 5

The first show on Wednesday was Enda Walsh's *New Electric Ballroom* at the Traverse. It deals with three sisters, two of whom repeatedly relive their failed love lives. We saw Walsh's *The Walworth Farce* last year, a stunning play which was the best thing that we saw during our 2007 visit, showing at the National in London from September after a successful run in New York. *New Electric Ballroom*, written a year earlier than *The Walworth Farce* but covering some similar territory, was an excellent production - arguably one of the best shows of this visit - but it did not quite match *The Walworth Farce*.

The next show was *Scaramouche Jones*, a one man show, written and performed by Justin Butcher and directed by Guy Masterson at the Assembly Rooms. It was originally premiered in Dublin some years back when Pete Postlethwaite played Scaramouche, a clown who has decided to die on the eve of his 100th birthday. The play deals with the colourful first 50 years of his life before he became a clown. As an aficionado of the one man show I have to say that this was up there with the very best of them. It was beautifully written, very well paced and, as one critic said, Butcher's performance was spellbinding. The lady in front of me on the way out was muttering to herself "amazing" - difficult to disagree with her. Excellent.

Remaining at the Assembly Rooms we see another one man show, *The Tailor of Inverness*. Matthew Zajac covers the life of his father, chronicling his childhood in eastern Poland, his experiences during the Second World War, and his eventual arrival in Scotland where he spent the rest of his life. The first two thirds of the show was in a pleasant dramatic form while the remaining one third was factual. Although we enjoyed the show we did not think that this format worked successfully, although once again we appear to be in the minority.

The last show of the day was *Bale de Rua*, best described as a mixture of Brazilian dance and acrobatics, performed by a troupe of 15 very talented and very fit artists. Hugely enjoyable, particularly by those women in the audience who were persuaded to join in towards the end of the show.

Day 6

We started the day with a visit to the *Foto: Modernity in Central Europe 1918-1945* exhibition at the Dean Gallery (part of the Scottish Gallery of Modern Art), taking our usual leisurely walk through the pleasant parts of the New Town, Dean Village and over the Water of Leith. This was an interesting exhibition which has been well received by the critics. I particularly enjoyed the early rooms, e.g. the surrealist room, which showed a time when photography was very much seen as a close relation to other forms of visual art. A coffee was followed by a visit to the main gallery over the road to see *Tracey Emin: 20 years* before we set off for our long annual lunch with the Sibbets (who ran the first B&B that we stayed at many years ago) and the Cohens (long-standing festival devotees).

Festival activities resumed with *Lynn Ferguson: The Plan* at Gilded Balloon Teviot. This was a modest workmanlike show with several pieces on the subject of death.

This was followed by *Jerry Sadowitz - Comedian, Magician, Psychopath II* in the "Purple Cow". He gets a bit more outrageous as the years go by ... one wonders where it will all end up. The early rants were fine and the magic was as good as ever, but the prolonged rant at the end smacked of somebody who had run out of material.

On to the Assembly Rooms for *A Drunk Woman Looks at the Thistle*, a one woman show which is "a 45 minute rant on the political climate in Scotland ... which questions Scotland's political ideology, Scottish cultural identity and, most importantly, the view and treatment of women in modern Scotland". I quote this from OnStageScotland because it was delivered in a fairly thick Scottish accent and with much use of Scottish vernacular. The locals in the audience found it amusing but, as we struggled to understand much more than 50%, it was somewhat over our heads.

Day 7

The final day of our visit started with *Reasonable Doubt*. This was a tale of two jurors meeting up two years after the trial that they sat on and just before the retrial is due to start, discussing their differing views of the original trial, their would-be relationship and their lives since the trial. An enjoyable two-

handler.

This was followed by a trip to Zoo Southside to see [Holdin Fast](#) by DOT504, a Czech company. This dance production is described as a "dreamy ballad of sexual dependency, inspired by Milan Kundera's [The Unbearable Likeness of Being](#)". It was very enjoyable and made me yearn for the return of Aurora Nova.

After a beer in the Cafe Royal, we take in [The Expert at the Card Table](#). Guy Hollingworth, a very urbane, smooth performer, tells the story behind the book of the same name which was first published in 1901 and has never since been out of print. He chronicles the story of its author Samuel William Erdnase and his friend, the troubled con man Milton Franklin Andrews, interspersing the dark tale with amazing card tricks which get more impressive as the show goes on, particularly as he seldom stops the narrative to concentrate on the magic. Extremely enjoyable.

23 shows (and three art exhibitions) down ... just the one show to go. After dinner we head to the Traverse one last time for Daniel Kitson's [66a Church Road](#). We have seen Kitson before and enjoy his rambling, self-deprecating, storytelling style. This was about his love affair with his flat in Crystal Palace. It was very enjoyable albeit it tended to get slightly repetitious towards the end ... here I go again ... just shave 10-15 minutes off the current 90 and it will be great Daniel!

In Summary ...

The weather was not wonderful although it was not as bad as made out by the media. My initial fears were not realised; we managed to avoid using the Fringe box office system at all, but we heard several tales of punters who had not been so lucky, particularly some who had pre-booked when the fiasco was at its height.

Although there was no "must see show" this year the general standard of what we saw was good; the Traverse programme was better overall than it has been for several years; but The Art Festival failed to hit last year's heights - not surprisingly. The main themes this year seemed to be violence, killing and death. Nudity was also prominent ... and I thought that on-stage nudity was somewhat passé these days?

Our shortlist of recommendations (from the shows that we have seen) is as follows:

- [New Electric Ballroom](#), [Terminus](#) and [Free Outgoing](#) (Drama)
- [Bale de Rua](#) and [Holdin Fast](#) (Dance and Physical Theatre)
- [Scaramouche Jones](#) (One person show)
- [66a Church Road](#) (Comedy)
- [Impressionism and Scotland](#) and [Foto: Modernity in Central Europe 1918-1945](#) (Visual Arts)
- [The Aluminum Show](#) and [The Expert at the Card Table](#) (just for general enjoyment).

And what should we have seen? We always come away from the festival wishing that we had seen various other shows during our stay but were unable to fit them in. This year's list of missed opportunities is smaller than usual, both productions not coinciding with our visit: [365](#) and [Matthew Bourne's Dorian Gray](#), although we will fortunately be seeing the latter at Sadlers Wells in September. We had also planned to see one of the productions on the Forest Fringe but we noticed just before going up to Edinburgh that the programme had been changed significantly and our chosen show had disappeared.

Addendum (September 2008) - we duly got to see [Matthew Bourne's Dorian Gray](#) at Sadlers Wells. The critics had in general not been impressed with it, complaining about the choreography and calling it a "missed opportunity". Perhaps they expect too much from Bourne, perhaps some arrive with preconceptions of what a Dorian Gray production could / should encompass. Anyway, as mere punters we deign to disagree with their take on the production. We thought that it was very good: the set was very effective; the dancers were terrific; and the storyline resonated. All in all a very good start to our autumn season.
