

Appendix A - A Selection of This Punter's Favourite Shows

Blackbird by David Harrower was the highlight of our visit in 2005. It was an excellent riposte to the frequent criticism that the International Festival all too often fails to serve up top-class drama. This excellent production, coupled with outstanding acting, made for a thought-provoking evening on a difficult and unpleasant subject, a sexual relationship between a 40 year-old man and a 12 year-old girl, for which he is subsequently jailed. The action is set 15 years later when she seeks him out; he is now married with a new identity.

Moscow Stations (1994) – was an adaptation by Stephen Mulrine of an autobiographical novel, entitled *Moscow-Petushi*, by Venedikt Yerofeev, written in 1970. An intelligent man, Yerofeev was expelled from Moscow University for absenteeism and insubordination, after which he drifted from place to place, quickly becoming an alcoholic. The book is based around the author's planned journey from Moscow to Petushi, some 80 miles away. This alcoholic philosopher, now a member of the disaffected under-class, vividly portrays the faltering world of the USSR in the era of Brezhnev, covering major issues such as employment, love, economics, and religion, interspersed with recipes for cocktails using any at-hand ingredients such as perfume, sock deodoriser and brake fluid. It is, by turns, extremely humorous and deeply moving. The highly original novel was not officially published until the late 1980s, a couple of years before Yerofeev's death. It has since been translated into 16 languages. Tom Courtney's performance in this one-man play at the Traverse in 1994 was utterly spellbinding and it continues to maintain top place in our personal list of top shows. It subsequently transferred to London and then off-Broadway.

Black Watch (2006) – stunning first appearance at the festival by the newly formed National Theatre of Scotland. It was based on the regiment and included elements of its history and its involvement in the Iraq struggle. The choice of venue, the University of Edinburgh Drill Hall, was a masterstroke.

The Master and Margarita (1991) – this was an adaptation of Bulgakov's Faustian tale of the devil's appearance in contemporary Moscow and his relationship with a writer and the woman that

he loves. It is part satire, part fantasy and part comic absurdity. It was the first show that we saw in Edinburgh in 1991, and it remains one of our favourites.

A Place With The Pigs (1995) – Communicado's hugely entertaining version of Athol Fugard's comedy, which is based on the true story of a Russian Army deserter who spent over 40 years hiding in a stall behind a pigsty. The *piece de resistance* was the use of music from three brass players to provide continuity, and most ingeniously to play the pigs, using their instruments to make pig-like squealing noises.

The Suicide (1997) was Communicado's version of Nicolas Erdman's satirical play on Stalinism and the chattering classes, a piece that readily resonates with us today. Semyon is the unemployed hero who relies on his wife's meagre wages, a wife and mother-in-law that he is constantly arguing with. He eventually decides that he is going to kill himself. When this fact becomes known he is besieged by assorted elements of Russian society, each of which want to use the opportunity to create an ideological martyr as a means of protesting against the powers that be. His death is to represent: the anguish of the intelligentsia or of the artists, the interests of business, the cry for freedom of repressed romanticism, or of free love, *et al.* One of his neighbours is keen to act as his agent. Semyon never realised that he had such influence!

Orlando (1992) - Red Shift's excellent adaptation of Virginia Wolf's novel.

The Coat (1997) – an inventive production of Gogol's *The Greatcoat* by Theatre Credo (Bulgaria).

Mr. Puntilla and His Man Matti (1998) - Brecht's amusing play with Sean Foley and Hamish McColl of Right Size in the lead roles about the lord of the manor who lurches between drunkenness, when he is friendly and humane, and sobriety when he is cruel and egotistical.

Nixon's Nixon (1999) – was a well-acted two hander (Nixon and Kissinger) that is set just a couple of hours prior to Nixon's resignation. Black farce is arguably the most apt description.

Bogus Woman (2000) - was a very moving one-woman performance of the trials and tribulations of a genuine asylum seeker.

Twelve Angry Men (2003) - was an adaptation, directed by Guy Masterson, of the celebrated film with the inventive and successful casting of twelve comedians in the roles of the jurors.

Woofski, Gruffski & Fidorevich (1993) - a very amusing tale of canine obsessive, wandering Russian vaudevillians, inventively portrayed on a minimalist set using very basic props. This was the sort of show that personifies the Festival, an excellent performance in a church hall by a group of young talented actors.

Ralf Ralf - It's Staring You Right in the Face (1993). For me this was a minor classic, an extremely amusing piece on the body language of people on television and in the public eye. Just to demonstrate that individual tastes vary greatly - it went straight over Janet's head.

Eclipsed (1992) - was a very poignant tale of pregnant girls and unmarried teenagers put in an Irish nunnery to avoid family disgrace - set in the 1950s.

Shylock (1998) - a one-man show performed by Gareth Armstrong. It was an amusing, provocative piece that explored anti-Semitism.

Grace (1997) - was a very slick, amusing piece on the dreams and fantasies of a single woman who has reached the milestone of her 30th birthday.

Meeting In Rome (1994) - was an enjoyable well-acted piece written by Michael Mears on a mythical meeting between Ibsen and Strindberg in Rome.

Right Size - Do You Come Here Often (1999) - extremely funny, surreal piece by Right Size.

The Snow Show (1996) - a one man show of a Russian clown, Slava Polunin, had as its *coup de theatre* a finale which consisted of a snow blizzard (alias bits of paper) that was blown over the audience by wind machines.

Emma (1998) - was a very entertaining spoof of Jane Austen's classic.

Puppetry of The Penis (2000) - it was succinctly and accurately described by one critic as genital origami; two men turning their private parts into

different objects. It was amusing as much for the reaction of the audience. There was a distinct Hen Night atmosphere, approximately 65% of the audience being women. There was much shrieking and cries of "oh no" (as in that must be painful) from many of the young women, accompanied by much "seems alright to me" shrugging from the males.

Say Nothing (2000) - Two men stood on top of a sod of earth, which in turn was balanced on top of a suitcase, playing multiple Irish characters. Ridiculusmus's darkly humorous show on the Troubles in Northern Ireland - the title being derived from the local saying "Whatever you say, say nothing".

Bright Colours Only (2002) - was a comedy, consisting of several pieces around the subject of death. We filed into the auditorium (the entrance was adjacent to the stage area), chatting with two friends that we had bumped into in the queue. The chat was curtailed when we realised that we were being greeted individually as attendees at a wake by a lady. She thanked each of us for coming and asked us to find a seat and get a drink. The stage area was set out as a parlour in her house and the people who were near the front of the queue were seated on the stage (note that it was not raised) while the rest of us were mainly in seats just adjacent to the stage. As the audience was still coming in (it obviously took sometime for her to greet everybody) waiters came round among us, some with sandwiches and others with glasses of whisky. I decided to go for the whisky, assuming it to be cold tea, only to find that it was indeed whisky. This surreal picture was heightened by one member of the audience who was sat on the settee on stage. He started laughing at the whole bizarre scene; he had a very loud laugh and found it very difficult to stop, initially. At the end of an amusing show we were asked to process behind a coffin (that was empty at this point!) out of the venue. The exit led out onto Rose Lane (a pedestrian area). We dutifully followed and the coffin was put into a hearse which signalled the end of the show, whereupon the audience applauded to the absolute bemusement of passers-by and the people who were sitting outside the next door pub having a quiet drink.

Luminous (2002) - Japanese dance with innovative use of props, sound and light.

Only The Lonely (2003) - this was an enjoyable piece on a Roy Orbison look-a-like, complete with some

of Orbison's best hits that most of the audience sang along with. Written and performed by Pip Utton, one of the stalwarts of the one-man show genre.

Observe The Sons of Ulster Marching Towards The Somme (1995) - Frank McGuinness' powerful play, which was set in World War I, on the religious bigotry of Northern Irish soldiers.

Secret Death of Salvador Dali (2002) - was a piece that perfectly captured what a weird chap he was, notwithstanding his superb draughtsman-like artistic skills - though probably not suitable for the young girl of around 10 who was sitting in the row in front of us.

Marc Salem (2001) - it is difficult to know how to label him. He says that he "does mind games". The act appears to be a cross between magic and mind reading.

Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood* (1994) - an inventive one-man performance by Guy Masterson (in pyjamas).

When The Bulbul Stops Singing (2004) - was a moving account of life in Ramallah during the Israeli occupation according to a middle class Palestinian lawyer.

Terre Haute (2006) - this was a classic Edinburgh piece: a two-hander, excellently acted with a minimalist set. It was based on the Oklahoma bombing and featured a series of imaginary meetings between the bomber and an elderly writer (seemingly based on Gore Vidal).

The Walworth Farce (2007) - a tragedy played as dark farce where an Irish father attempts to rewrite the reasons for his sudden bloody departure from Ireland through a daily "play" which he and his two sons have put on for many years, largely hidden away from the world in their flat off the Walworth Road in London. The pace was fast and quite dizzying, the acting excellent.

Macbeth - Who is that Bloodied Man? (2007) - an outdoor show in the Old Quad. Characters on stilts, Nazi-looking motorcyclists, and burning palaces ... this was a spectacle with minimal dialogue ... "More the charred bones of Shakespeare's play than the flesh" said Lyn Gardner in *The Guardian*. So long as you were not expecting vanilla-flavoured Macbeth then this was an inventive and

spectacular production.

Victoria (2007) - This powerful piece was based on an elderly woman, played by Dulcinea Langfelder, with senile dementia who struggled to recognise her visitors. Although her memory was fading her imagination was intact, as she danced the tango with her wheelchair as a partner and talked to her shadow. This was a gentle, thoughtful piece of physical theatre on a difficult subject, witty and poignant.

Scaramouche Jones (2008) - 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.

The Expert at the Card Table (2008) - Conjuror Guy Hollingworth, a very urbane and 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.

It's Always Right Now Until It's Later (2010) - Daniel Kitson has been doing a storytelling piece at The Fringe for a number of years now, usually in addition to his stand-up show. This was arguably his best so far. He managed effortlessly to mix the comic with the poignant. This particular piece covered the lives of two separate individuals who never met.

The Sixteen (2010) - I came across them on the BBC's excellent *Sacred Music* series. While I am something of a musical barbarian I thoroughly enjoyed their Greyfriars concert - music by Tomás Luis de Victoria and Juan Gutiérrez de Padilla, two Renaissance composers from Spain

Roadkill (2011) – a very harrowing but powerful play about people trafficking. It concerns a young Nigerian girl who is immediately forced into prostitution on arrival in the UK. The play takes place in a flat in Edinburgh's New Town which adds to the drama but it means that the audience is limited to 13 punters. By chance we bumped into some of the cast at the Pleasance the following day and were able to talk to them about the production. It was their day off and they were in search of some light relief, which is unsurprising. It must be very draining for them.

The Rape of Lucrece (2011) – this ranks among the very best one-man shows that I have ever seen. Gerard Logan was simply superb in this production of Shakespeare's narrative poem with its minimalist set (a single white scarf!). His ability to make the language understandable from the beginning by his use of pace, pitch and pausing was something to be greatly admired.

Mies Julie (2012) – a very powerful, smouldering re-invention of Strindberg's play by Yael Farber who moves it from a piece about class and gender in the late 19th century to cross-race relationships in modern-day South Africa. It is set on a Karoo farm where Julie, the white daughter of the farmer and "a feral cat on heat", sets out to entice John, a black labourer whose family also work on the farm.

Watt (2012) – a one-man show by Barry McGovern in an adaptation of Beckett's novel. The critics did not seem to be overly enamoured, some complaining that it was too short (at 54 minutes). I thought that McGovern was excellent and his command of the large Royal Lyceum stage with no set was a wonder to behold.

Quietly (2013) – a memorable play indeed. This Abbey Theatre production deals with the meeting in a Belfast pub of a Protestant bomber and the Catholic son of one of those who killed by the bomb in the very pub where it happened some 36 years earlier. Playwright Owen McCafferty is very spare and precise in his language. Jimmy Fay's direction is tight and tense throughout, while the actors Patrick O'Kane and Declan Conlan give tremendous performances. The effect on the audience is palpable. There was no coughing, no rustling of belongings, no movement at all ... just absolute silence as we listened hard to every word and to every silence.

Grounded (2013) – a production from The Gate, written by George Brant and directed by

Christopher Hayden. A nameless high-octane female pilot goes from being one of the boys, someone who knows that she is good at her job, through marriage and pregnancy to end up as a drone pilot who works from a trailer in an American desert, a job which ultimately leads her to question her sense of self. Lucy Ellinson gave a compelling performance in this one-woman show.

The James Plays (2014) – an ambitious trilogy written by Rona Munro, covering James I, James II and James III of Scotland. The plays certainly showed how difficult it was to govern 15th century Scotland. Personally, I found James III the most satisfying, dramatically. They were arguably the National Theatre of Scotland's most impressive productions since *Black Watch*. They were subsequently shown at the NT in London.

Man to Man (2015) – a highly polished production of Manfred Karge's play where Ella assumes the identity and the job of her dead husband Max in order to survive between the wars in Germany, and she continues with the deception long afterwards. Actor Margaret Ann Bain slips easily between genders and class, giving an excellent solo performance.

Various performance poets over the years, most notably John Hegley, Roger McGough and Luke Wright.

Various comedians over the years, most notably Rory Bremner, Bill Bailey, Jerry Sadowitz (plus magic), Will Durst and Rich Hall (in the guise of Otis Lee Crenshaw).

In 2010 we saw Tim Vine's *Joke-amotive* which I really enjoyed. Tim does puns (lots and lots of them, almost without pausing). I defy anybody not to laugh within a minute of the start of his show. He resembles Tommy Cooper in some ways although he operates at a much faster pace. It is obvious from reading reviews of his shows that he is not the critics' cup of tea although they are forced to accept that he is extremely popular with us punters!

Finally, more on Dance and Physical Theatre. Particular mention should be made of Derevo, the inventive Russian company that has appeared on The Fringe a number of times, most recently with *Mephisto Waltz* (2012) and *Harlekin* in 2010. Other enjoyable shows in recent years have included: *All Wear Bowlers* (2005), *Bale de Rua* (2008) and *Grupo Corpo* (2010).