



Brighton Festival and Fringe: The art of standup

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There are stand-ups — and then there are stand-ups. It would be very easy to sit from the safety of the back row and criticise, and anyone who is brave enough to get up and try and work a crowd has to be applauded. But the quality of the attempts to practise this dark art can vary enormously — and sometimes it begs the question, why are the less skilled practitioners doing it? It's not our job to laugh, it's the comedian's job to make us laugh — and anyone who starts to berate the audience for not finding something funny is on the fast track to a new career.

Adept at working his audience was John Hinton, who had us in his palm from the get-go with his (almost) one-man show, *Albert Einstein: Relatively Speaking*. True, it was less standup, more comic musical (or musical comedy: MC2), but here the audience was given a masterclass in how to make an ostensibly dry subject — Einstein — lively, interesting and funny. Hinton plays the scientist giving an acceptance speech, accompanied, with musical interludes, by Jo Eagle as Einstein's first and second wives, as well as his mother.

This was an intelligently crafted, confident piece of work. Our MC (master of ceremonies) was completely comfortable with his subject, not only explaining the theory of relativity using audience members but also filling us in on the detail of Einstein's life — at times quite serious (the impact of his work on the second world war, for example) — through humour and song. Who can forget the $E=MC^2$ rap? Entertaining, informative, quirky, original. Genius, Mr Hinton — Einstein would be proud.

The *Fantasia* at the Warren (by far the best venue of the Fringe) was comparable insofar as it engaged the audience fully from the outset. This was the story of a bipolar girl who is haunted (stalked?) by her alter ego. Theatre Temoin produced an incredible stagework that will blow you away with its extraordinary use of mime, original music — by Milkymee (watch out, Gabriel Yared) — and puppetry. (And when it comes to comparisons, were there not echoes of Einstein's brain when the head of the previous victims of our fantasist's 'demon' poke out from the wardrobe as puppets?) If you've seen Gainsbourg on the big screen, this is from the same school — a gripping, imaginative, dark tale that will inevitably, in that oh-so French way, end badly.

Both these pieces transfer to Edinburgh — you cannot afford to miss either.

<http://brightonfestival.org>; <http://brightonfringe.org>

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