



# Brighton Festival and Fringe highlights

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Oh, what a season, oh, what a show! We Brightonians (and Hovaks) turn into cultural gluttons at the start of each May and have this year gorged on a real feast of top entertainment. That includes some excellent premieres: an imaginative visual take on Britten's *Canticles*, a co-commission with Aldeburgh (world premiere), *The Kite Runner* — brilliantly brought to the stage to give the book and film an extra dimension (European premiere), (the innovative, deeply moving and intensely personal stories of Lola Arias and company in *My Life After* (UK premiere) and festival commissions, not least Mariele Neudecker's captivating *Heterotopias and Other Domestic Landscapes*.

A month ago, we were told that the Festival and Fringe bring up to £20m in revenue to the city — surely a conservative estimate for this year given that, between them, the Festival and Fringe have hosted more than 1,000 events. That takes some doing. Michael Rosen's input as Festival guest director brought an interesting slant to proceedings, and the organisers of both Festival and Fringe must themselves take a bow. A big shout too, to Nicky Haydn and her team who run some of the Fringe's most exciting venues, from groundbreaking comedy at Upstairs at 3&10 to a wealth of talent at the popup Warren (by far the Fringe's chilliest hangout), and now a music festival (Meadowlands) to boot.

There were other highlights. The Spiegeltent rolled back into town and became a focal point for late-night, Aperol-inspired musings, while Hendrick's brought its *Carnival of Knowledge* to an elegant townhouse on the seafront, where we debated the lot of the idler in history among other languorous topics, over a refreshing gin of tonic.

Show after show was packed to the rafters, which signals just how greedy we audiences are. A frequent bleat is that Festival friends snap up all the tickets, but full houses is better for everyone than the alternative. The easy answer is to put on a longer run. *No Fit State's* fabulous show, *Bianco*, ran for three weeks in the big top on Hove Lawns, and was still drawing huge crowds on its final weekend. But they had their own venue, of course. You couldn't reduce the number of different events at the Dome, say, or Theatre Royal. Regrettably, Nina Hagen's *Musik Kabarett* was postponed — but maybe it's our good fortune that it's not all quite over yet.

## Top five of the Festival

*Britten's Canticles* — a co-commission with Aldeburgh for the centenary celebrations, Neil Bartlett and four others add an engaging, at times ethereal visual element to the five diverse compositions that span Britten's lifetime.

*My Life After* — Lola Arias and fellow actors reconstruct the often shocking truths of their parents' lives growing up under dictatorship in Argentina, through photographs, letters, archive footage, memories and clothes. Intensely moving.

*Cirkopolis* — Cirque Eloise rewrite the laws of physics with impressive skills on the Cyr wheel and diabolo among other props, with phenomenal juggling thrown in. Jaws will be dropped.

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The Kite Runner — Brilliant stage adaptation that creates atmosphere with live tabla music and a kite-shaped backdrop with images projected onto it. You've read the book, you've seen the movie. You may think the play has nothing to add. It does. Never has the journey from Kabul to California been told so evocatively.

Blast Theory: Fixing Point — This outfit can always be relied upon to produce edgy, challenging, technology-based work, and this haunting walk in the woods, recapping the story of murdered Irishman Seamus Ruddy, does not disappoint.

Top five of the Fringe

Bianco — Circus par excellence in a big top that invites you to witness magic. Creative, boisterous entertainment in a promenade performance that draws the audience into the action. A delightfully joyous, energetic show for kids and grownups alike.

Albert Einstein: Relativitively Speaking — John Hinton's intelligent, informative and even at times moving musical comedy based on the life of the scientist. An engaging, warm, original talent who knows exactly how to work his audience. Standup wannabes, take note.

The Fantasist — Mime, dance and puppetry come together in this achingly beautiful piece of theatre performed by Lecoq-trained Theatre Temoin.

Beasts — From slick to slapstick, a hilarious hour of silly standup from a comedy trio riffing on all manner of subjects, especially kids' TV, from Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles to Where's Wally?

Inspector Sands: A High Street Odyssey — A pedestrian shopping street in Hove will never look the same again after this oddball meander blending comedy, history and several well-placed stooges to give us fresh perspective on the environment around us. Written and directed by Ben Lewis, you couldn't wish for a more entertaining guide than Philip Bosworth.

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