

Edinburgh Festival Fringe review: Fe Fi Fo Fun, Go and see this 'Canadiun'! (*****)

Sticks, Stones, Broken Bones.

Underbelly Pasture

August 15 @ 2.20pm/August 16 @ 6.30pm

All ages.

Wowing delighted audiences young and old with his esoteric shadow-puppet paraphernalia, the Canadian-born, goggle-eyed potty Professor maestro of imaginary manipulation, Jeff Achtem, is reviving, for two shows only, his highly acclaimed, award-winning Fringe 2010 show, 'Sticks, Stones, Broken Bones'. Achtem casts a spell of surrealistic, captivating enchantment through the use of projected shadows and all manner of ephemeral junk that he brings to life with vivid characterisation and devilish anarchy. No surprise the youngsters adore him. This promises to be a unique opportunity to walk along-side the dark side of this febrile imagination and perhaps even enjoy an illicit frisson of fear. So, Jeff, what's it all about?

It doesn't have a specific narrative thread, it's more a cabaret of shadow-puppet stories. It's similar to 'Swamp Juice' (see our review) in that the mechanics operate from the front but it has a little more sentimental, happy to be alive approach. It's great what The Fringe offers me with a platform to explore new work with 'Swamp Juice' but I don't particularly want to be running two shows concurrently for a whole month.

The show only runs for two performances over two days. What was the thinking behind that?

The Cow Underbelly has a gigantic screen, about five or six square metres, with different projection opportunities. They offered to let me use it so I've adapted the show to take advantage of that. But it will still be quite intimate.

Finally, have you had chance to take in some shows?

With about about twelve characters in 'Sticks, Stones, Broken Bones' and about over sixty-five 'Swamp Juice' the maintenance on them has been more than I anticipated, what with the sometimes damp conditions. So I've been doing a lot of repairs and puppet surgery in between. Often I'll just make a puppet once and if it works go back and make it properly but it often doesn't work out like that so they tend to be always falling apart. But I did get to see 'The Table', Pleasance Dome, ('Depraved puppetry', apparently) and Alvin Sputnik ('one-man micro-eco epic puppetry') Cowgate Underbelly.

So there we must leave Jeff Achtem to attend to 'Birdie-Birdy' and the Goblin' Goblin's cosmetic surgery in the sure knowledge that tickets to these two shows are certain to be an outstanding deal – with plenty of strings attached.