

Edinburgh Festival Fringe – Return Of The Lumberjacks Review



Picture the scene:- It's 2010 and I have two tickets for my wife and me to go to the Queens Hall in Edinburgh to see a comedian called Stewart Francis. I had seen him on Mock The Week and Live at the Apollo, so I was a tad excited about going to see this very funny man in the flesh, my body however had different plans for me because as I stood in my place of work something that started as a small dull pain in my mouth grew into fully blown banging my head off the wall toothache.

I contacted my dentist who luckily had a spare place, so I went up and had lengthy work done on the tooth that was causing so much trouble. It left me incapacitated, though, so much so, that I ended up going home quite ill and had to give up my tickets to my wife's mum and dad, while lying on my sofa feeling sorry for myself.

At around 10.30pm that night my in-laws called to say that I had missed a great show and that they had thoroughly enjoyed every minute and of course this made me feel better....I don't think.

The following February I was on a train to Liverpool and I had Stewart's DVD (Tour de Francis) with me. Watching it with headphones in, I suddenly realised I was being watched by all the other passengers, because it turned out I was laughing very loudly while watching it.

So this year when I saw that Stewart was playing in the Fringe, I was determined nothing was going to stop me from seeing him live, and thankfully nothing did.

On arrival at The Assembly Rooms one of the first people I spotted was Madness singer, Suggs, however as he was being rushed out of the venue he did not have time for a chat which was a shame, then comedian Stewart Lee walked behind the reception desk and was doing a book signing and having pictures taken. As someone who was never previously a Festival lover I was seeing famous folk all over the place.

The show was billed as 3 Canadian comedians, Craig Campbell, Glenn Wool and Stewart Francis so taking my seat in the second row (no chance of taking a front row seat as we all know what can happen if you do) I was really looking forward to a good night of comedy – and boy did I get it.

Craig Campbell was the show's compere for the evening and he was very good indeed. His knowledge of Scotland and Scottish people is superb and had me and those around me laughing very loudly as he went through his routine. Then he suddenly said that tonight there would be two additional "Canadian Comedians" appearing on the show as a special treat. He brought out the first one who he described as an "honorary Canadian". It was none other than Jimmy Carr and his appearance on stage resulted in the room erupting in clapping and cheering.

There was also some good natured booing too (have people remembered some tax type stuff?). Jimmy proceeded to do his stand-up act, he was reading from a sheet of paper which I took to be a prop and was enjoying his jokes when Jimmy got into a bit of "banter" with some of the audience. One person took it too far and would not keep quiet, much to the annoyance of a lot of the audience and I can only assume Jimmy himself, but as we eventually saw, Jimmy dealt with the heckler brilliantly. I am sure if the person had been removed from the hall that would have been given a massive cheer. Unfortunately the person was in the bar outside the hall after the gig, and wasted no time in telling people very drunkenly that she was the person who had been doing the heckling.

Next up we had a man who was initially unknown to me, and probably a lot of the room, who goes by the name of Glenn Wool. He walked onto the stage in denim jacket and trousers with a Guns 'n Roses T-shirt on. At first glance he's the sort of guy you would avoid eye contact with, and he actually broaches this subject during his show.

I saw him as more a storyteller than a joke-teller and he was very funny indeed including stories about Scotland, Canada and bankers. He was a very funny man to all but one person in the audience. As we chatted after the show it became apparent to both of us that it was possibly the same person who had annoyed everyone earlier in the show. This person was so rude and obnoxious they actually shouted out "go home" to Glenn as he was in the middle of a story. You could sense that someone who normally deals with hecklers in the normal way, he was actually quite annoyed at those two words, so he proceeded to answer the person. After a little back and forth the audience started telling the person to be quiet (that was the nicest phrase used) and when I interviewed Glenn afterwards he gave me his thoughts on it. The rest of his stint on stage was very funny indeed and he got rapturous applause when he finished. I interviewed Glenn after the show and the interview is posted below.

Craig Campbell came back on to introduce the next guest who he described as "a Canadian guy who used to come into the forest to tell jokes as the sun went down". He introduced the act as Baconface and a man in a Mexican wrestler's mask walked on stage and proceeded to tell a very long but funny story about the woods and a grizzly bear which I dare not print here. All the way through it I felt that I knew the person behind the mask and indeed, at the end of the show, it was revealed that Baconface was actually Stewart Lee who had been doing a book signing just a short time before.

It was the time for the final act: the fantastically funny Stewart Francis. He walked on stage to thunderous applause,

cheering and whistling and then proceeded to hit us with rapid fire jokes and one-liners. Now earlier on in the week the 10 best jokes of the festival had been published and Stewart has two of them. I was a bit annoyed that this had been announced before I had been to see the show. Nothing worse than spoilers, but both jokes were still very very funny because a lot of Stewart's routine is not just the jokes but also the delivery.

A lot of comedians can tell jokes but Stewart's method of delivery adds so much to the actual joke. His routine was superb and now has me longing for November when Stewart is on his own tour, Stewart Francis Outstanding in His Field. (you need to see the poster that accompanies this tour to get the joke)

At the Festival Theatre afterwards I got a quick interview with Stewart and he was a delight to speak to even though I became the butt of a joke at one point! (Never been prouder!) After relating to him my story about his 2010 show, I think he was close to tears The whole show was wonderful and the two special guests only added to a great night.

Here are interviews with Stewart Francis and Glenn Wool listen out for a special guest appearance from some noisy fireworks.

<http://www.mixcloud.com/basher1969/interview-with-stewart-francis/>

<http://www.mixcloud.com/basher1969/interview-with-glenn-wool/>