

Edinburgh Festival Fringe: Edinburgh Science, Edinburgh Magic *****

Edinburgh Science, Edinburgh Magic. Ron Butlin with Dick Lee and Anne Evans. *****



This intriguingly entitled show returns, by popular demand, for its third year fronted by Edinburgh Makar and Jazz-Slam-Tram-provocateur – Ron Butlin. The show celebrates but never ingratiates itself within its eponymous setting – a city of wily charms sacred and profane. Where sepulchral secrets whisper weavily within the midnight mist-cowled wynds, where the restless ghosts of its literary, scientific and philosophical alumnae get seriously miffed by the Tattoo fireworks kicking off again! Even worse – Trams on phantom rails in existential crisis marooned on Princes Street. But for the most part it is a celebration of paradigm shifting Edinburgh scientific giants such as James Simpson (original chloroform-party animal). Butlin accredits his development of anaesthetics for creating ‘...painless death and painless resurrection’ (Didn’t Burke & Hare spin a similar tale?) Composer, Dick Lee on clarinet and bass-sax, with flautist, Anne Evans, (her late 19th century Louis Lot flute mellifluously seductive) lend warmth, wit and nuanced, sound-scapes.

We learn about Geo-Godfather, William Hutton. He took a walk up Salisbury Crags and discovered that ‘zigzag time lies flat-packed.’ That when the Higgs-Boson particle turned up at the sub-atomic Physics party – ‘people’s particles became charmed and strange’.

And then there was the ballad of poor Lily. People just did not realise how patronising their attitudes to her old age had become even more ossified than her bones would ever be. She takes a pick-axe out in to the garden one stormy, summer's day and seriously revises their attitude to 'language'. Such is Life on Planet Butlin as he trials new performance writing in preparation for his 2014 anthology entitled, 'Edinburgh Science'. This is a show to savour – full of genuine Edinburgh charm and wry, self-deprecation – and sometimes gritty candour too. It features poems from Butlin's acclaimed 2012 The Magicians of Edinburgh and short stories from No More Angels. Just do not get him started about trams – because so far – they have not! A real treat to take home as a Festival memory – it really is a kind of magic.

Edinburgh Science, Edinburgh Magic. Summerhall. Venue 26. Aug 2-15