

Edinburgh Festival Fringe

REVIEW Bench Bites ****

☒ 'Bench Bites', Laughing Horse @ The Phoenix, Jam Sponge Comedy, 20:45 until 25 August, 18+, Free, 4/5

A bench, six actors, at least 30 characters, 1 hour in a basement with over 40 audience members and a restricted view. It could have been hell. The fact that it wasn't – the fact that it was often really funny – owes much to the quality of the writing and to a young professional cast with the confidence, energy and comic timing to keep things moving briskly along.

Jam Sponge serve up a variety of British stereotypes and grotesques whose paths cross around a humble bench in a 'typical' English public park. We meet their fake beggar, struggling lovers, joggers, mothers and Essex girls, irritating posh students, Mengele-style local-authority juice detectors, a camp fitness-fascist and various shades of muddled humanity wrestling with sexuality. The humour ranges from so-so social observation to moments of genuinely sinister surrealism

This reviewer particularly liked the girl at first infuriated by her boyfriend's infidelity, then jealously intrigued, attracted and empowered by the account of his one-night-stand's disintegrating butterfly costume in a bath full of soapy confusion.

This reviewer enjoyed the yummy-mummy Melanoma performing star jumps with four babies strapped to her knees and elbows.

This reviewer was guiltily doubled-up by the violent ukelele-playing, improvisational serenader stalking a Canadian tourist.

In short, Jam Sponge do dark humour particularly well.

The show is cleverly paced, with several rather satisfying little surprises – scenes which don't end the way the way you think they will, characters who deliver lines which, instead of making you laugh or sneer, suddenly make you take stock. A gay cruiser's touching defence of his wrought-iron 'gateway to Paradise' and the sanctity of a human touch is a prime example.

Jam Sponge enjoy a seaside laugh, but are capable of and deliver far edgier funny moments. These, one suspects, will be their making.

Worth watching now. Good bet for the future.

Reviewed for The Edinburgh Reporter by Alan McIntosh who is the editor of [Broughton Spurtle](#).

[Free but further details here.](#)