Edinburgh Festival Fringe REVIEW Paul Zerdin ****

In an age when The X Factor, Britain's Got Talent and The Voice are the staple diet for British television, it's easy to forget that 40 years ago variety shows were quite often the highlight of the weekend's viewing. These shows, often on a Sunday evening, would be compered by a comedian wearing a dinner jacket and bow tie and would include acts such as singers, dancers, comedians and ventriloquists. The latter artists seemed to have faded away from British television in recent years – no doubt affected by the public's disdain for the likes of Keith Harris and Orville the Duck. However, the art of ventriloquism is, if the brilliance of Paul Zerdin is anything to go by, well and truly back.

Zerdin, who says he was inspired by the great Ray Alan, took to the stage at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival on Tuesday night and simply wowed his audience, some of who had queued patiently to see him for some time (a wee tip to those organising the queues at the Gilded Balloon – try placing the 'Queue Here' signs to where you actually want people to queue…)

Zerdin's skill with his sponge puppets from Boobies, the tantrum throwing toddler, to Sam, the cheeky wee boy and Albert, the old man with attitude had the audience in raptures. Even when Zerdin made a minor slip early on he covered it brilliantly with his puppet declaring 'Don't laugh – I can't talk if you laugh'

Impressive though that was, I found Zerdin's final act with two 'volunteers' from the audience utterly hilarious. Wearing mouth masks, the volunteers were taken on stage to be at the mercy of Zerdin's vocal mockery – but they and, in particular, the audience couldn't get enough and the standing ovation at

the end for this hugely talented ventriloquist was richly deserved.

Already a huge star, Paul Zerdin has entertained members of the Royal Family at the Royal Variety Performance in London. Tonight, in Scotland's capital city, Zerdin's show was fit for a King.

Submitted by Mike Smith