


Defy the Norm: The Fringe at The Scottish Storytelling Centre

Puppets, poetry and plays, music, monologues and *Men with Coconuts* – and yes, lots of storytelling and exhibitions too; the **Scottish Storytelling Centre's 2016 Fringe Programme** has something for everyone.



The Centre is a vibrant arts venue right on the Royal Mile, with its own theatre, Storytelling Court, café and bookshop. Busy throughout the year, in August it becomes a Fringe Venue hosting great events for visitors of all ages – starting with the very youngest. Pre-schoolers can meet a high-wire hippo, a peek-a-boo cat and a loveable seal in *Celeste's Circus*, while for the over-5s *Erin, Errol and the Earth Creatures* is an enchanting tale – complete with puppets, music and storytelling – involving strange creatures, welly boots and ways of learning to live with the earth. For families with older children, **Puppet State Theatre Company** returns with *Leaf by Niggle*, its acclaimed new production of **JRR Tolkien's** story about a man creating his masterpiece while irked by interruptions.

This year's musical events include **Will Pickvance's** acclaimed family show *Anatomy of the Piano (for Beginners)*, which takes audiences on an entertaining musical journey through piano history – and space travel. Meanwhile **Hamish Napier** (*piano,  flute, whistle, vocals*) & **Adam Sutherland** (*fiddle*) present *Nae Plans*, a spontaneous traditional session of off-the-cuff talent that guarantees to have you on the edge of your seat. And there's more music in *Burns for Beginners*, featuring the

bard's key poems and songs performed to cracking musical accompaniment, along with discussion – and English subtitles!

☒ If it's grown-up comedy you're looking for, how about ***The Moira Monologues?*** Comic creation **Moira Bell**, the alter ego of writer/performer **Alan Bissett**, is a cleaner and single mother. The hardest woman in Falkirk is accompanied by some of Hallglen's finest; her long-suffering pal Babs, her neighbour Bawface, her laddies (*they're gid laddies, but they canny take their hash*) and her wee dug Pepe. Who will come off worst in an encounter with the local rottweiler? Prepare for some terrifying entertainment.

'People are still asking me to bring Moira back, so I've dusted off her knee-highs to reunite her with her fans at the home of stories, as well as show new audiences how this feisty character can please the crowd and get the laughs, but also say a lot about class and women in society.' (Alan Bissett)

More Burns? **Gavin Paul's Robert Burns: Rough Cut** brings you ☒ the Bard for the 21st Century. Based on **Donald Smith's** controversial novel ***Between Ourselves***, this show focuses on the pivotal crisis of Burns' life and career – his stay in Edinburgh. Recreating his lost (or unwritten) diaries, we meet Edinburgh, high and low through Burns' eyes – encountering the familiar and unexpected. It's the man behind the myth, but one who wears many masks.

☒ More drama is provided in ***Cradle King***, an intimate audience with Shakespeare's patron James VI and I. Brainy, dream-haunted, theatre crazy, peace-loving, he's the real-life Hamlet. But whose ghost might get him first? James was the inspiration for both the Prince of Denmark and Macbeth; he was also a poet in his own right, and a peacemaker. But who murdered his father, and why did he do nothing to save his mother Mary, Queen of Scots from the block? Find out first hand in this raw virtuoso drama; **Robin Thomson** shines as the wisest fool in the unique setting of **John Knox House**.

Storytelling is of course the Centre's raison d'être. If you fancy having a go yourself, the **Café Voices** sessions include open mic slots – but if like me you'd rather just sit back and enjoy, try **Mara Menzies' *Nzinga Warrior Queen***, in which the acclaimed storyteller (aided by music & dance from **Yamil Ferrer**) explores one of the world's most intriguing yet little known female rulers. Born into a patriarchal society in ancient Angola, Nzinga defied tradition to become Queen with the aim of keeping her people safe from the Portuguese slave traders. Exemplifying the Fringe 2016 core message, she learned to ***Defy the Norm***.

☒ Poetry? **Loud Poets** offer you slam-style, make some noise, fist-thumping, pint-drinking, side-tickling, heart-wrenching poetry for the masses, devoid of pretension and featuring the best spoken word artists from Scotland & beyond. Accompanied by a live band, they promise an exciting, different show every night.

The Storytelling Centre has always championed the Scots language, and in ***O is for Hoolet***, **Ishbel McFarlane** (in association with **Feral Arts**) delivers an award-winning, fervent & interactive one-woman show, using stories, memories, interviews & attitudes to challenge expectations & prejudices about 'Lowland Scots.' Language is personal. Nothing gets closer to our hearts. Who owns it? Who governs it? And why? By interrogating the history of Scots, and the ways in which it is subdued, Ishbel invites the audience to question the way forward for minority languages.

☒ The Centre's Storytelling Court is an excellent backdrop for exhibitions. One of the highlights of this season is going to be **Dale vN Marshall's *I Am Not A Child***; the UK's hottest new text-based artist – who started out spraying graffiti on Bristol's streets – shines a light on childhood trauma, inspired by a group of young Scots. Dale aims to help to raise awareness of mental health in the young, drawing inspiration from the time he spent painting and talking with

teenagers in Edinburgh who live with conditions such as anxiety, ADHD, autism and circumstantial trauma. This new body of work explores heavy mark making with elements from the children's poetry and graffiti text, shining a light on our innermost thoughts and feelings. Read The Edinburgh Reporter's interview with Dale [here](#).

And if after all that you're in need of some refreshment, look no further than the **Story Café**. Social innovation charity **Comas** ('ability' in Gaelic) took over here earlier this year; it was already running **Serenity** in Holyrood (Scotland's first recovery café), which will tell many locals exactly how fabulous this place is. The café not only offers delicious food and drinks – it's also is a great space to meet friends, in a light and bright a child-friendly space that looks out onto the busy Royal Mile and has lots of space for buggies. It's one of my personal favourites (even though I'm well past the buggy stage...) and highly recommended.

So what about those **Men with Coconuts**, I hear you cry? Don't panic – they'll be here every evening 3-11 August. This experienced cast of actors works together to discover the comedy in scenes suggested and inspired by audience members. *The List* gives it five stars and says it's 'Absolutely fantastic... a must see show'. What more need we say?

For more information about the Scottish Storytelling Centre and to book tickets for any show, go to <http://www.tracscotland.org/scottish-storytelling-centre>, phone the Box Office on 0131 556 9579 or just call in to the Centre at 43-45 High Street. Opening hours during August are 10am-6pm Monday to Saturday, 12 noon-6pm Sundays.