

Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2016 REVIEW – AcaDemic: Cambridge A Capella On Tour ft. Fitz Barbershop and The Fitz Sirens****



In Greek mythology, **Sirens** were beautiful yet dangerous creatures who lured nearby sailors with their enchanting music and voices to shipwreck on the rocky coast of their island. (Odysseus was one of the few mortals to outwit them, having his crew tie him to the mast and ignore his pleas for release till the danger was past.)

On this damp Edinburgh afternoon we could certainly do with some enchantment, not to mention a bit of entertainment too, and happily, that is what we get, as the two oldest and best a *cappella* groups of the University of Cambridge, **Fitz Barbershop** and **The Fitz Sirens**, take us on an exhilarating ride through jazz, soul, pop – and even a bit of traditional Scottish sentimentality – in the space of one fast-paced hour of outstanding singing.

✘ The Sirens open the show with a lively version of the Tamla Mowtown hit *Ain't No Mountain High Enough*, swiftly followed by **Bob Dylan/Adele's To Make You Feel My Love**, featuring a beautiful solo by the hugely talented **Genevieve Simpson**.



Back to the beat, and the girls claim another jazz standard as their own as they zip through *It Don't Mean A Thing*.

The Andrews Sisters were the queens of close harmony for over forty years; whether the Sirens will still be singing in 2056 is yet to be seen, but their energetic rendition of the wartime favourite ***Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy*** certainly gives us hope. Every member of the group exudes enthusiasm; **Alice French** stands out as a singer totally at ease in her role.

✘ The men of **Fitz Barbershop** are almost all Cambridge choral scholars and it shows; not only is every voice fabulous, every singer knows how to play the part. Cranking it up to the max (and wearing some fantastically flamboyant waistcoats) their version of ***Come Fly with Me*** is a lot more fun than Frank Sinatra's, and their ***Goodbye My Coney Island Baby*** comes complete with hat games, step dancing, and a great solo from **Jonno Goldstone**, whilst **Isaac Jarratt Barnham's** falsetto harmonies are pure joy.

Bridge Over Troubled Water is one of those songs that everyone knows, and woe betide anyone who messes with it (Hear'Say 2001, anyone? Thought not..) The Barbers take all risks in their stride and produce an excellent version, sensibly keeping the amateur dramatics to a minimum for this Simon & Garfunkel classic – **Joel Nulsen** making an especially strong bass contribution.

✘

It's hard for anyone to better **Gloria Gaynor's *I Will Survive***; it's not become a feminist/gay anthem for nothing. The Sirens have a good stab at it, but with a little more conviction their version could be even better. There are plenty of highlights in the girls' second set though, including a tight cover of the **Eurythmics' *Sweet Dreams*** and a powerful performance of **Duffy's *Mercy***.

✘ The Barbers continue the show with an alternately moving and hilarious take on ***Loch Lomond***. If you're not Scottish born and bred, the only way you can deal with something like

this is to throw yourself into it headlong and hope for the best, and this they do to great effect. Boaters are held to men's chest with funereal solemnity, a quick burst of the macarena has the audience in fits – and in among all the mayhem, there's a perfect solo from **Bowen Wang**.



What else to finish the afternoon but a camp version of the campest hit of my youth? This is ***Bohemian Rhapsody*** as even Queen have never have seen it before; the Barbers' facial expressions are unmatched – if **Neil Grant** ever wants to give up studying Natural Sciences (and who wouldn't?) an acting career surely beckons – and the *Maggnifico* rings out along the line like a hammer on a xylophone. Once again Isaac Jarratt Barnham's and **James Veale's** falsettos make light work of Freddie Mercury's classic top notes, and a very junior member of the audience joining in particularly appositely at '*Can't do this to me baby*' only adds to the high (or should it be low?) drama of this operatic piece.

This is a fast-paced, fun show in which the comedy is never a cover for lack of skill. These are singers at the top of their game, and it's no surprise that the Sirens and Barbers are already booked to visit China next month on the next leg of their tour. They're only in Edinburgh till Monday (15th), so catch them while you can. ***AcaDemic*** is on at [SpaceTriplex](#) in Hill Street at 2pm on Sunday 14th August and 1.45pm on Monday 15th; tickets cost £8/£6 and are available from the Fringe Box Office on 0131 226 0000 or online [here](#).

