

Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2017 – Swan Bake ****

‘I’m really angry at my parents for letting me follow my dreams because now I can’t get a job.’ Bell wants to get back into the Royal Ballet School, but that’s much easier when you aren’t tripping balls. Second Sons brings you Brighton Fringe Award-nominated Swan Bake which splices edgy humour, alt-ballet, and punk puppets with awe-inspiring originality. Not suitable for the easily offended.

This is [Second Sons](#)’ first time at the Fringe and they’ve produced an entertaining, challenging and fun show. This is not fun for all the family or those of a delicate sensibility. If you can laugh about drug use, Christianity and LGBT relationship problems though, this is a show for you.

Swan Bake plays with theatrical conventions and ignores the fourth wall between the cast and audience. That may make it sound pretentious but the play has its tongue firmly lodged in it’s cheek. The three cast members have fun with the script and run with it, manically at times but in a most delightful way.

The script proudly wears its influences on its sleeve, freely admitting it’s borrowed from elsewhere. The programme, which is a lovely piece of folded A4, lists “Things we ripped off/paid homage to/recreated,” which I thought was a nice touch.

I was surprised that the list didn’t include Mark Ravenhill’s [Shopping and F**king](#) given the play riffs on Diana and the Lion King.



However, I'm putting that down to not knowing the play rather than a deliberately uncredited influence. The play centres on Bell and her girlfriend Maria, their addiction to Nonce, a hallucinogenic drug, and their lives. The play is honest about addiction, drug use, the lies addicts tell themselves and others, plus how much time is spent monging. The company have come up with a great way to visual representation for using Nonce that works in the play's context. The show isn't just about addiction.

Also covered is the Catholic Church's hypocrisy regarding the emotional, physical and sexual abuse of children and damning those who are attracted to the same sex. I even learned a new Bible reference, Mark 9:42, to use in arguments with such bigots.

The play also has a deftly achieved pop at people who fail to take responsibility for their own faults and failings. The puppetry works really well and fits the female leads' state of mind; the production does well to make their presence feel natural rather than shoe-horned in for cheap laughs.

Lastly, there's a very funny but gentle joke at the expense of the Guardian and its readers. Second Sons describe Swan Bake as "theatre for people who don't like theatre." I don't know if it is as I like theatre, at least the good stuff; its certainly that.