

Edinburgh Science Festival – Science of the Sesh

Science of the Sesh – A Class Act

Edinburgh loves a trinity of festivals, scientific breakthroughs and a good swally. So why not combine all three? It's all a bit school days to start with: you're lining up up outside the Dissection Room at Summerhall, then called in to take a seat at a lab bench, speaking in hushed tones whilst waiting for this class act to start. The only disparity here is the G&T you're served upon arrival. Unless you were privately educated it's doubtful this was a feature of your typical lesson.



Our teachers for the evening are two extremely enthusiastic and knowledgeable young lads. Over the next 2 hours they talk us through the experiments they have lined up for us, most of which involve a good measure of scientific fact, a dash of charm and humour topped with a hearty slosh of the good stuff. Depending on your expectations for the evening you will either be delighted or dismayed to discover that they have worked out that each of us will imbibe 5 units of alcohol during this sesh – 1 unit shy of the official binge drink limit.

The evening follows the structure of an introduction to each drink / experiment, then a practical effort leading to a tasting before reaching a conclusion on the findings. And it's terrific fun. Interaction with your fellow benchmates is gently encouraged during the practical segments and the eager chatting about the tastings does bring about heady memories of school science lessons. Everyone gets involved: we take turns shaking up a vodka martini, have our senses confused with reversed colours and smells, bark out wrong answers to questions (some things never change for this writer) and listen intently when the science behind it all is dropped on us.



And the mixology of science and alcohol is deeply entwined and fascinating. More ice in a drink doesn't dilute it, rather it brings out the flavour; a spirit is served that is derived from duck fat, which is fowl in more ways than one; different methods create different reactions creating different flavours. Some good questions are poised, too: at one stage we sample different White Ladies, one made with lemon juice and another with a lab produced citric acid. The taste of the synthetic citric flies and can guarantee better purity than actual lemons – should we create it here instead of clocking up carbon miles importing lemons? Quite the acid test.

Towards the end it predictably gets a bit rowdier and the presenters have the sense to keep the later stage more succinct and snappy. We all softly slur our thanks and pile out to Summerhall. The evening captures the spirit of the Science Festival perfectly: a heap of fun and you learn something to boot. They've hit upon a neat formula in Science of the Sesh. Science is cool, man.

And, 5 units or not, I can attest the next morning was a definite truancy. Once the boffins crack the science of the hangover cure I am a willing guinea pig.

