

Fringe performance



Mary Brennan
Dance critic

Caesarean Section, Summerhall



RED ALERT: Subtitled Essays On Suicide, Caesarean Section from Poland's Teatr Zar fuses moving visuals and stirring music to create an unmissable blend.



Teatr Zar from Poland subtitle their performance *Essays On Suicide*. A bleak phrase that is rendered into a work of such gut-wrenching intensity that to talk in terms of elegiac beauty, reckless physical passion and profound spirituality might seem at odds with re-enacted attempts at self-destruction. But Caesarean Section negotiates these extremes with a potent awareness of how life takes on a prized allure in the face of encroaching death.

Wine-glasses splinter shockingly on the floor, adding to the risk that glints from a line of crystalline shards embedded down the middle of the stage. The recurring spillage of red wine is like a ritual offering to the gods, or an echo of holy communion, and a hint of blood shed by a desperate hand. A man and two women tussle in love-hate tangles of clutching or resisting limbs. And all this, in itself, is edgy and compelling. But add in the music, the spine-tingling polyphonic sonorities of heart-sore songs from Corsica, Bulgaria, Iceland (and more), and Caesarean Section floods into your senses like an aching reminder of how fleeting our time is. Very few Fringe shows are unmissable: this is one of them.

Runs August 15-20.

Rime, Summerhall



I SAW this after an accident had reduced the Square Peg Contemporary Circus company from six to five performers – and can only puzzle over what might have been different in a show that looks, sounds and plays as if this is how it was put together in the first place. The framework takes its cue, and some of the spoken text, from Coleridge's epic poem, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. A couple of tall poles and a scaffolding rig soon set the scene on-board ship while a tremendous soundscape, that includes live singing, conjures up the unsettling climate – not just weather, but mental malaise – that dogs the voyage.

Our mariner and his ship-mates soon prove to be an agile, versatile bunch who use choreographed movement, acrobatics, rope and pole work, to show how brisk daily routine falls helplessly into the doldrums while music and costuming feed into nicely eerie episodes that whisper of curses and hallucinations. It's a thoroughly bold and sophisticated attempt to use circus skills as a vehicle for story-telling. But if the intent is serious, the outcome is a lively piece of visually-striking family entertainment.

Ends August 15

What the Folk!, Dance Base



'Come away in, now...!' Hands are shaken, tea and cake passed round, and – this being an Irish welcome – we're soon sitting in the parlour of an actual Grassmarket flat. Four members of the National Folk Theatre of Ireland (NFTI) begin chatting away, merrily referencing the song and dance that's made about culture and tradition. Before you know it, they're on their feet rattling out the hard-sole rhythms that we think we know from *Riverdance* and the like. It's hugely genial, but the mix of fine singing, lively dancing and roguish anecdotes about their own lives and times with NFTI steadily builds up an informative picture of what they do, as a group. And why it's a far cry from the poodle-curl wigs and sequin-emblazoned frocks of the competitive Irish dance scene that bruises so many hopeful hearts and ambitious toes.

Ends August 19

Red, like our room used to feel, Summerhall



I'm reluctant to give too much away about the comfort-zone installation or the one-to-one poetry reading that Ryan van Winkle provides along with the offer of a cuppa or a wee glass of something stronger – partly because everyone's experience will be different and special to them. Let's say this is like a spa treatment for the Fringe-frazzled inner being. A brief oasis of calm, where being read to is a welcome pleasure not often enjoyed beyond childhood. My own goody-bag of poems sent me back out into the Fringe-fray with a renewed sense of how inconsequential fragments of time and place can often become the most precious and pungent of memories.

Ends August 24