LIAM RUDDEN – MUST SEE THEATRE

Edinburgh's Mr Entertainment picks his Hot Tickets to see in the Capital and beyond

Life of Pi

An epic journey, a life-changing holiday, a Fifties' whirlwind romance and a dive into London's clubland are just some of the stories waiting to be told on Edinburgh and London stages.

At its heart, no matter how you dress it up, theatre is simply storytelling. It's about the ability of a writer and a performer to share an adventure, an emotion, a happy ever after. The best can do this with words alone. Of course, with the right dressing, whether that be staging, lighting or sound design, a great story can become even more magical and that is exactly what you'll find at the Festival Theatre later this month when Life Of Pi (25-29 June) sails on to the Nicolson Street stage.

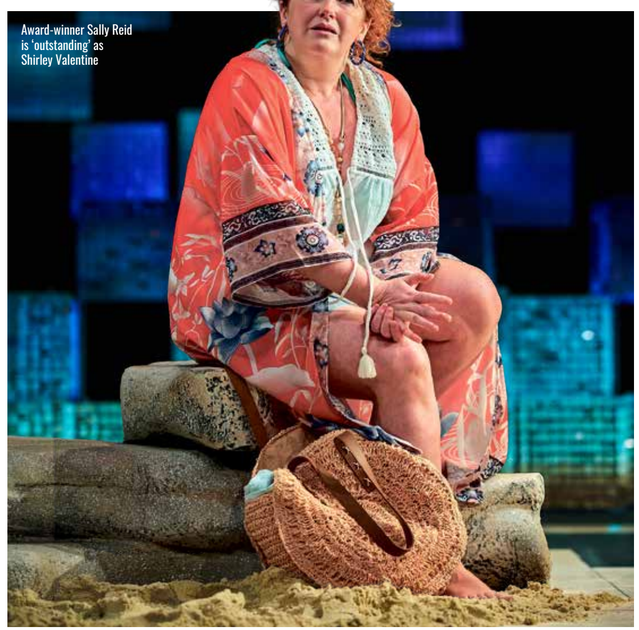
Based on the Man Booker Prize winning book by Yann Martel, which has now sold more than 15 million copies worldwide, and having conquered the West End and Broadway to great acclaim, the Olivier Award-winning play comes to Edinburgh as it embarks on its first-ever UK tour. The story revolves around 16-year-old Pi Patel. After an epic storm in the Pacific Ocean, the teenager finds himself stranded on a lifeboat with four other survivors - a hyena, a zebra, an orangutan, and a Royal Bengal tiger called Richard Parker.

As they coexist for 227 days, Life of Pi uses jaw-dropping visuals and world-class puppetry to create a magical piece of storytelling that has been described as 'a wonder to behold' as it regales audiences with an epic journey of endurance and hope. Must See Theatre, indeed.

Running time 2 hours 10 minutes, including interval. Tickets £28.50-£52.50 **https://www.capitaltheatres.com/whats-on/all-shows/life-of-pi/2135**

Over at the Lyceum right now, they're planning the launch of their 24/25 Season. All will be revealed on 3 June and, shortly after those revelations, another well loved play, Shirley Valentine (12-29 June), checks into Grindlay Street for a 17 night stay. Bringing the hit Pitlochry Festival Theatre production of Willy Russell's bittersweet classic to the Lyceum finds Sally Reid reprising her award-winning, 'outstanding' performance in the title role of a piece that has been called 'a celebration of women, freedom and what it means to find yourself again'.

We meet Shirley, a bored, middle-aged wife and mother as she contemplates what has happened to her youth. She feels lonely, disenchanted and in a rut. Her children are all grown up and she's stuck at home with only the kitchen wall to talk to. Shirley dreams of a better life, free from the chains of her domestic boredom and an unappreciative husband. When her best friend suggests a trip to Greece, Shirley packs her bags, leaves a note on the cupboard door and heads off for a fortnight of rest and relaxation. However, in Greece, she meets Costas, rediscovers herself, finds happiness and everything she has been missing. She realises that there is more to life than the dull, mundane existence she leads back home. Now, Shirley has a big decision to make... Funny and beautifully observed,



Award-winner Sally Reid is 'outstanding' as Shirley Valentine

Running time TBC (The piece usually runs approx 2 hours 10 minutes with interval). Tickets £14-£35 from **https://lyceum.org.uk/events/shirley-valentine#dates-and-times**

Edinburgh's very own Doody, local actor Keiran Lynch (you may have seen him as Peter Pan in last year's panto at the Festival Theatre) rolls into The Playhouse this month, or should that be 'rock'n'rolls', as a new 'grittier' explosion of summer loving comes to town. Yes, we're heading back to Rydell High where there may be a new term starting but Grease (25-29 June) is still the word. When has the story of Sandy and Danny ever not had us under its spell?

After a whirlwind holiday romance, leather-clad greaser Danny and girl-next-door Sandy are unexpectedly reunited when she transfers to Rydell High for her senior year. But can they survive the trials and tribulations of teenage life and find true love once more? It doesn't really matter that everyone knows the answer already, Grease is now one of the world's best-loved musicals. Actually, it has always been, just ask anyone of a certain generation who will remember queues outside the ABC and other cinemas for weeks on end to see the movie when it was first released. Forty-six years on, Danny Zuko and Sandy Olsson are still stealing hearts.

That said, the great thing about Grease is the fact it's another of those musicals where it doesn't really matter who lands the leads roles, the songs, as they say, are the stars so expect Summer Nights, Greased Lightnin', Hopelessly Devoted to You and You're the One That I Want... but don't sing along, I know, it's difficult, but try to restrain yourself until the medley at the end. There's always a medley at the end, isn't there? So, round-up your T-Birds, pick up your Pink Ladies and re-discover why Grease really is the one that you want... after all, you wouldn't want to be left stranded at the drive-in.

Running time 2 hours 20 minutes including interval. Tickets £28.50-£89 **https://www.atgtickets.com/shows/grease/edinburgh-playhouse/**

Right now, Pet Shop Boys Neil Tennant and Chris Lowe are undergoing a bit of a renaissance with their new album, Nonetheless, charting at No 2, their Greatest Hits world tour, Dreamland, still going strong and now the return of their West End musical, Closer To Heaven (until 30 June) is upon us. It's a brand new production by Turbine Theatre, starring Frances Ruffelle, and it's my 'Theatre Break Hot Ticket' for June, but it's selling fast so get in quick.

Narrated by iconic, retired rock legend and actress, Billie Trix, Closer to Heaven is the story of Dave, just arrived in London from Ireland and looking for a job… which is how he comes to find himself behind the bar of successful gay nightclub, Vic's Club, where he dreams of being a singer while quickly falling in love with the eponymous owner's estranged daughter, Shell.

Frances Ruffelle as Billie Trix in Pet Shop Boys' Close To Heaven

Edinburgh's Kieran Lynch (second left) as Doody in Grease

However, the path of love is never easy and when Dave meets drug dealer Mile End Lee in the club, his life can never be the same again.

The new production boasts an impressive cast led by Tony Award winning Frances Ruffelle as Billie Trix, who already has two iconic musical theatre roles to her credit – Ruffelle originated the roles of Eponine in Les Misérables and Dinah in Starlight Express.

Also in the cast as Dave is Glenn Adamson, last seen in Edinburgh as Strat at The Playhouse in Bat Out Of Hell.

With a book by one of Britain's most celebrated writers, Jonathan Harvey, and the iconic sounds of Pet Shops Boys, Closer To Heaven will see the Turbine Theatre transformed into Vic's Club and seating for this immersive production will be allocated on arrival. Doors will be open one hour before each performance where you will be assigned a seat. An exciting concept.

Running time TBC. Tickets £42.50 and more details at https://mustseetheatre.com/news-pet-shop-boys-closer-to-heaven-ready-to-charge-the-imagination-at-londons-battersea-power-station-everything-you-need-to-know/

That's me for another month, as always I'd love it if you could check mustseetheatre.com for all the top news, views and reviews from Edinburgh, London and beyond and just a reminder that you can access all my Edinburgh reviews online on the Edinburgh Reporter website.

Until next time, happy theatre-going,

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