LIAM RUDDEN – MUST SEE THEATRE

Edinburgh's Mr Entertai[illegible]ks his Hot Tickets to see in the Capital and beyond

Mrs Doubtfire

As the Fringe fades, Come From Away and Blood Brothers wait in the wings...with Mrs Doubtfire

AS EDINBURGH packs away another Fringe and Festival there's just enough time to reflect on the ever changing landscape of the Capital in August. There can be few not to have noticed the Old and New Towns were significantly quieter this year. Indeed my contacts at the venues tell me only the weekends lived up to expectations, while some PR friends have found it almost impossible to get reviewers into their shows, so few of them are there on the ground.

The Fringe especially is going through a reshaping process at the moment, still trying to recover from the decimation of the pandemic years. The fear is it now has a business model more aligned to making money on the alfresco venue bars than the shows that lie at the heart of the event.

Simply put, unless productions are centre stage, what is the point of the Fringe? And as long as the costs of performing here prohibit many of the companies that were once regular participants returning, then the boast of being an "open access" event is meaningless.

I relied on my venue insiders keeping me up to date on the first couple of weeks of Fringe 2024 as I was in London, rehearsing and opening a show to bring to Edinburgh for the final week of August. It was cheaper for me to do that than to rehearse and open the show in my hometown, where I am based. If anything points at the Fringe being broken, it's that. Thankfully, change can only be a good thing. The Fringe has always evolved and will, I'm sure, continue to do so, although I reckon it will look quite different a few years from now.

In the past, the month after the Festivals would mean a dearth of theatre in the city, but that too is changing. This September brings three exciting productions to town, one at the Festival Theatre and two at The Playhouse.

The first is Sir Ian Rankin's second Rebus play, A Game Called Malice (10-14 September), starring Gray O'Brien as the eponymous capital detective.

The setting of the piece is a splendid dinner party in an Edinburgh mansion, where the evening concludes with a murder mystery game created by the hostess.

L-R Sir Ian Rankin and Gray O'Brien

Allan Simpson

A murder needs to be solved. But the guests have secrets of their own, threatened by the very game they are playing. And among them is Inspector John Rebus. True crime is his calling. Is he playing an alternative game, one to which only he knows the rules?

There are suspects, clues and danger with every twist and turn - and a shocking discovery will send this game called "Malice" hurtling towards a gasp-inducing conclusion. Will you work it out first?

Starring alongside O'Brien will be Abigail Thaw as Stephanie Jeffries and one time Emmerdale favourite Billy Hartman reprising the role of Jack Fleming, which he originated in an earlier version of the play at the Queen's Theatre, Hornchurch.

I saw that production, and very good it was too. Can't wait to see the new extended version when it premieres at Edinburgh's Festival Theatre.

Running time to be confirmed. Tickets £25-£43 from **https://www.capitaltheatres.com/whats-on/all-shows/rebus-a-game-called-malice/2339**

On the other side of town, the Playhouse has one new title and an old favourite lined up to tempt theatre-goers back to the venue after the excesses of the largest arts festival in the world.

First up is Come From Away (17-21 September), the remarkable story of 7,000 stranded passengers and one small town. Winner of four Olivier Awards, including Best New Musical on London's West End and the Tony Award for Best Direction of a Musical on Broadway in New York, this smash hit show shares the incredible real-life story of the 7,000 air passengers from all over the world who found themselves grounded in Canada during the wake of 9/11, and of the small Newfoundland community that invited these 'come from aways' into their lives with open hearts.

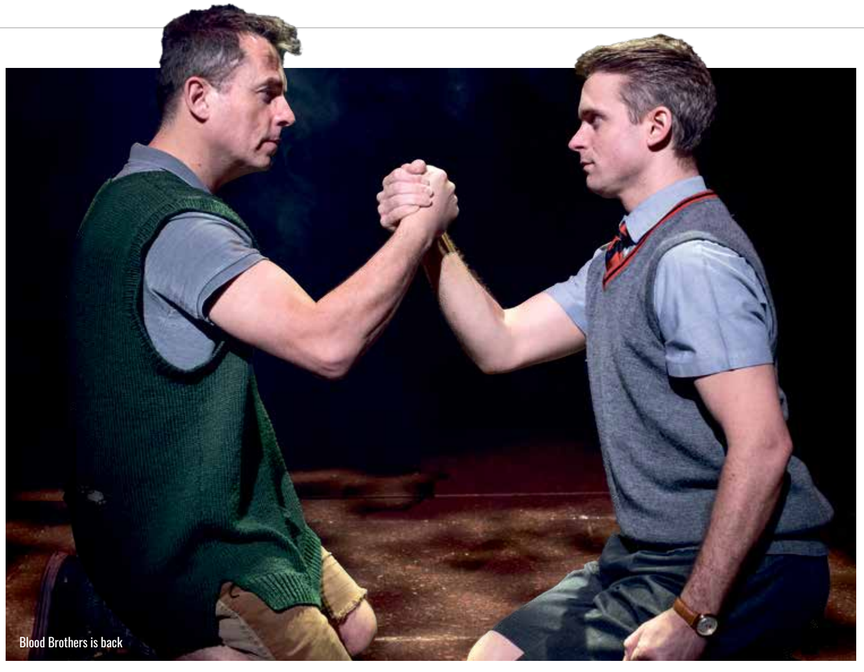
Book now and get ready to meet the first female American Airlines captain, a quick-thinking town mayor, the mother of a New York firefighter and an eager local news reporter - characters that are all based on real people caught up a moment that changed the course of history and the world, and whose stories became a true celebration of hope, humanity and unity. Note, there is no interval in this one.

Duration 1 hour 40 minutes with no interval. Tickets £26-£75.50 from **https://www.atgtickets.com/shows/come-from-away/edinburgh-playhouse/**

A week later, the always popular and evergreen musical Blood Brothers (24-28 September) returns to the Greenside Place venue for another week-long run.

I've lost track of the number of times Willy Russell's tale of the Johnstone twins, brothers separated at birth, has now played Edinburgh. This time it brings Scot Vivienne Carlyle back to the iconic role of Mrs Johnstone, the star having previously enjoyed nightly standing ovations for her powerful and poignant performance on London's West End.

The story: When Mrs Johnstone, a young mother, is deserted by her husband and left to her own devices to provide for seven hungry children she takes a job as a housekeeper in order to make ends meet. It is not long before her brittle world crashes around her when she discovers herself to be pregnant yet again - this time with twins. In a moment of weakness and desperation, she enters a secret pact with her employer which leads inexorably to the show's shattering climax.



Blood Brothers is back

Carlyle is joined in the cast by Sean Jones and Joe Sleight as twins, Mickey and Eddie, with Gemma Brodrick reprising the role of Linda.

Considered by many to be "one of the best musicals ever written", Bill Kenwright's production played more than 10,000 performances on London's West End to become one of only three musicals ever to achieve that milestone. Expect to hear musical theatre favourites such as Bright New Day, Marilyn Monroe and the emotionally charged show-stopper, Tell Me It's Not True.

2 hours 50 minutes including interval. Tickets from £13-£73.50 **https://www.atgtickets.com/shows/blood-brothers/edinburgh-playhouse/**

Nipping down the M1 or the East Coast Line for a London theatre break this month? Then I have the most joyous musical I've seen there since Moulin Rouge to recommend, Mrs Doubtfire: The Hit Comedy Musical is indeed Must See Theatre. A five star delight that will have you laughing, crying but always smiling.

The astonishing Gabriel Vick, in the famous wig, mask and bodysuit, effortlessly adopts Mrs Doubfire's familiar Scottish lilt to make the much loved character his own, while still channeling the essence of Robin Williams' chaotic energy. His is a brilliant, breathtaking and simply mesmerising performance that brings a whole new understanding to the term "all-rounder".

If you're not familiar with the story, it's a sad tale. When Daniel's long-suffering wife, Miranda, files for divorce, the judge gives her full custody of their three children, Lydia, Christopher and Natalie. Heartbroken, Daniel has but three months to find a job and provide a fitting home for his kids if he is to have any chance of winning back shared custody… enter Mrs Doubtfire.

Fit for all the family, Mrs Doubtfire is undoubtedly the most uplifting and masterfully staged production on in London right now, so, as the star of the show herself might say, "Go on dears, brace yourself… for the funnest two hours you will spend on the West End."

You can read my full five star review at **mustseetheatre.com**

Until next time, happy theatre-going,

Liam

Come From Away