

The logo for 'Fest' magazine, featuring the word 'fest' in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font on a black rectangular background.

THEATRE REVIEW

Sticks, Stones, Broken Bones



Sunday 15 August by Susan Robinson

With an affected cadence somewhere between that of Dr Nick from *The Simpsons* and the Cookie Monster, verbal communication is not an important element of Jeff Achtem's show. This only adds charm, as it allows him to retain a measure of mystery, and the audience to marvel at his bizarre talent for creating silhouettes out of bric-a-brac and bringing them to life.



Achtem has the audience intrigued from the very beginning as he unlaces the boot of a punter and makes a puppet right there on the stage. Sometimes it is difficult to know what to watch - the projection or Achtem himself - as he lies on a suitcase, legs in the air, manipulating a puppet with each.

With his ill-fitting trousers and gravity-defying hair, there is certainly something of the mad inventor about his patter. His puppet friends all have names and hang from a washing-line suspended across the stage. The creative use of found objects makes the show not unlike Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *MicMacs* only without the convoluted plot. Similarly, the slapstick and use of caricature resembles the low key humour of *Belleville Rendez-Vous*. It's certainly a more subtle and demanding craft than you'll often find at the Fringe.

Although not unsuitable, there doesn't appear to be a single child present and surely it can't be often that puppets keep an adult audience rapt. *Sticks, Stones, Broken Bones* is probably one of the most inventive and genuinely quirky shows at the Fringe this year.

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