

Edinburgh Fringe 2016 Review: Nina Conti: In Your Face

Nina Conti surprises no one by mastering a sell out show. [Amy Gibbons](#) reviews

Wednesday 31 August 2016



★★★★☆

Selling out the Grand @ Pleasance Courtyard right at the heart of Edinburgh's Fringe, Nina Conti is no stranger to an intimidating crowd. Perched on the end of a row maybe six, seven steps up from the stage, I watch as ticket holders struggle to locate seats together – some even considering the aisle floor as an option, setting stewards on edge. Brimming with anticipated faces and feeling very, very warm, the theatre is packed. And then, hush. Conti, completely unphased, is mounting the stage.

In Your Face is exactly what you'd expect from an exceptionally talented and experienced ventriloquist, popular the country over. Conti has previously appeared on Live at the Apollo, Russell Howard's Good News, and Sunday Night at the Palladium, and her confidence in her own act inspires a kind of awe in the audience. An ever so slightly stilted start gives way to an impressive performance, essentially in three parts: Conti will entertain first with her puppet monkey, before spending the main part of the act improvising with masks on audience members, and then ending with a kind of quirky twist on typical ventriloquism; as her own puppet apparently takes total control of its master.

Conti is clever, cheeky and charming. An extraordinary talent for improvisation makes for an astounding comic act, night after night. Asking each 'volunteer' from the audience only a couple of questions: What do you do? Who have you brought with you? – Conti immediately has her characters sussed, and comic caricatures make for extremely funny stage personas. Sometimes working with over five audience

members on stage at once, Conti is constantly sharp; juggling various accents and character traits, each invented by her only minutes previously. The audience are delighted by her effortless ability to make the ordinary hilarious, if always a little on edge at the prospect of being called on stage.

It's not surprising that Conti excels, but that doesn't make her act any less impressive. Engaging, inventive, and ever so slightly creepy - *In Your Face* is a breath of fresh air, and a success.



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