

The Guardian | Friday August 17 2007

Ivan's naffness a bit off-colour. But, for this day-patient, Brackenbury proved the perfect treatment for Fringe fatigue.

**Brian Logan**

Until August 27. Box office: 0131-556 6550.

## Edinburgh Opera

### The Turing Test

Augustine's

★★★★

Opera and science don't make for the most likely companions, though a work such as John Adams's recent *Dr Atomic*, set in Los Alamos at the time of the first atomic bomb tests, shows there is mileage to be had from the pairing. Julian Wagstaff's chamber opera *The Turing Test*, receiving its premiere on the Edinburgh Fringe, takes its name from the test proposed in the first half of the 20th century by British mathematician and cryptographer Alan Turing to ascertain whether a computer can be said to have intelligence. The machine must be able to hold an online conversation in which its responses are indistinguishable from those of a human correspondent – Blade Runner for the internet chatroom generation.

Wagstaff's opera, written for Edinburgh Studio Opera, centres on two rival scientists, both determined to be the first to create the machine that will pass the Turing test (a goal for which there is a serious financial incentive). The personal animosity between the American professor, Anton Milotovic, a white-suited, smooth-talking ladies' man, and the bumbling, shabbily clothed alcoholic Brit, Professor Colin Trevelyan, suggests a David Lodge style transatlantic comedy of academia, but the root of their feud is a rather more traditional operatic matter: student rivalry over the woman who is now Milotovic's wife.

That Wagstaff has written an opera set in the world of academia as part of his music PhD submission for Edinburgh University – to which Edinburgh Studio Opera is affiliated – seems apt, part of an

in-joke perhaps that also has Trevelyan's computer Lucie talking about opera with her programmers and crashing when she doesn't recognise the name Puccini. Wagstaff's musical style doesn't have any such Romantic leanings; it is lean, spare and lyrical. The young cast is competent – Georgia Knowler's research student stands out – but does a good job of engaging with the characters. Unusually for an opera, virtually all of the libretto (written by the composer) is crystal clear, while Christopher Neil's production makes sensible use of the venue's limited space.

**Rowena Smith**

Until August 19. Box office: 08452 262721.

## Edinburgh Comedy

### Jerry Sadowitz

Udderbelly

★★★★★

In the post-alternative comedy world, racism, sexism and disability are, however ironically, back on the agenda. But no one does them as outrageously (yet, finally, inoffensively) as the man who arguably kick-started the trend, Jerry Sadowitz. The Glasgow comedian-conjuror is a scatter gun of sociopathic rage, and if you think the disabled, Chris Langham or the McCann parents are sacred cows, you should get your steaks elsewhere. But when Sadowitz's mud clings, it's usually to himself. The opinions are constantly deglamorised by being spoken – well, bellowed – by a self-professedly bitter, impotent and overlooked man.

The humour lies also in the sheer extent of Sadowitz's misanthropy. No one's this nasty – or at least, not with a smile on their face. Is this picture "a lot of red dots", he asks, "or an aerial view of a university in Virginia?" He slams David Blunkett for being blind and Heather Mills for being "a cripple" – and "let's hope the next painting Pete Doherty does with his own blood is a mural". His shrink would probably call this projection: Sadowitz is just as offensive about his own identity, as a Scottish Jew. And, after a tirade against immigration news being brought to us by people called George Alagiah and Natasha Kaplinsky, he leaves a pause just long enough for us all to recall his own surname.

That said, an hour of uninterrupted loathing might be too much. So the rage

