

festival preview

The one thing to do

If you only have time to do one thing at the festival, what would you choose? We asked all our reviewers – the answers may surprise you

BELOW: No festival would be complete without Phil Kay. **RIGHT:** Watch out too far, clockwise from top left: Baba Brinkman; Jackie Kay; Stellan Skarsgård in *Dominion: Prequel to Exorcist*; Freshmess; and the Trashcan Sinatras

such a mental wreck held you back, Gustav?" – but, of course, he's dead. The music has all the answers – a cathartic spiritualism that transcends earthly ordinariness. My money's on Donald Runnicles to deliver the ultimate Mahler experience of this year's Festival, when he conducts the BBC SSO in the epic Third Symphony at the Usher Hall on 18 August.

Matt Brereton, Fringe reviewer
FORGET Franz Ferdinand, the best Scottish band on this year's T on the Fringe bill is Trashcan Sinatras. After eight years out of the limelight, the limelined Kilmarnock five-piece made an unheralded yet triumphant return in 2004 with their fabulous *Weightlifting* album, and now you can welcome them back in person at the Liquid Room on 19 August. And tickets are only £8 – that's less than the price of an hour's comedy in a sweaty Pleasance attic. Bonus.

Kelly Apter, dance critic
The sheer diversity of Dance Base's Fringe programme makes this venue a one-stop shop for dance fans. Stunning technique from two Scottish Ballet dancers, funky moves from hip-hoppers Freshmess and an exhilarating group work by Rambert and Kylie choreographer Rafael Bonachela, to name but three highlights. And this year, for the first time, Dance Base has branched out into cabaret, presenting "Drag Idol". Talent and tiaras on the Grassmarket – unmissable.

Zoe Green, Fringe reviewer
CHAUCER. Dry? Not if the charismatic and versatile Baba Brinkman has got anything to do with it. In *The Rap Canterbury Tales*, at C Venues, the Miller, the Pardoner, the Wife of Bath and Chaucer himself battle it out in a rap contest with the audience judging their performance. Frisky, humorous and ingenious.

Andrea Mullaney, Fringe reviewer
I CAN'T quite believe Bonnie 'Prince' Billy will actually play the Queen's Hall on 21 August. This shady misanthrope is certainly down to appear, but he's hardly trustworthy. His collaborator, Matt Sweeney, will supposedly accompany him on songs from *Superwolf*; their recent record about being eaten by sharks, singing like a seagull, a panther girl – and wolves. Or possibly about none of those things. I don't know. I can't wait to see who turns up.

Jan Fairley, EIF/Fringe reviewer
IN THE 1980s Italian guitarist Antonio Forcione juggled ping-pong balls while playing solos. Today his latest compositions are deeply reflective while his present quartet – involving Nigerian cellist Jemy Adejayan, Brazilian percussionist Adriano Adewale and Russian accordionist Igor Outline – is scintillating. Formidably inventive, he's still prone to moments of humour. See him at the Assembly Rooms.

Susan Mansfield, feature writer
VARIOUS institutions are celebrating Ian Hamilton Finlay's 80th year, but to get inside the vision of this unique and sometimes contrary artist, you have to visit his garden, Little Sparta, perched half a mile up a dirt track on the far side of the Pentlands. It feels as far away from the festival as you can get but, in a strange way, the spirit of the Fringe lives here as much as anywhere. You can catch a bus to Little Sparta from Inverleith House in the Botanical Gardens every Wednesday and Saturday until September.

