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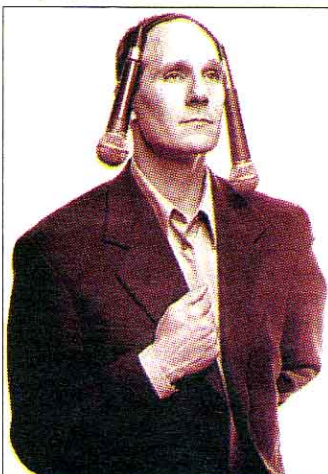
COMEDY

David Crowe ★★★★★

It's only when you see a stand-up routine as slick and professional yet pant-wetingly funny as this from an American at the top of his game that you realise just how half-baked a lot of British stand-up comedy is.

Crowe is a veteran of US stage and it shows. He has the crowd eating out of the palm of his hand from the start, as he produces a show which manages to blend pratfalls and physical idiocy with acerbic and erudite dissections of politics and religion.

An intelligent, liberal comic from Seattle, Crowe seems equally at home doing dumb-ass one-liners as complex highbrow routines about Shakespeare, managing to pull off both and seamlessly segue between them with a nerdy charisma that is



David Crowe: Behold, a master

utterly captivating. With barely a wasted breath, there is so much quality material in this show it's hard to single anything out but Crowe's skit on Americans being gasoholics was a relentlessly side-splitting tirade, up there with the best routines in comedy. A natural with ad-libs and even a dab hand at character comedy (his Las Vegas comedian character had tears running down most faces), Crowe is something of a comedy master. *Doug Johnstone Until Aug 28, Edinburgh Comedy Room (V9), 10.30pm. www.davidcrowe.com*

COMEDY

Dalton Trumbo's Reluctant Cabaret ★★★★★

Dalton Trumbo is the kind of frightfully posh, fun-loving eccentric that would invite you to his mansion for a gin-soaked party and then lure your wife into a bedroom to have his way with her. With very dubious sexual tastes (inflatable boys, dead ladies and prostitutes, depending on his whim), he loves any chance to be a bit rude and inappropriate, especially towards females in the audience, or, more accurately, their 'mazoombas'.

Dalton leads the jolly-making with his soft-rock Wonderbra song (he hates Wonderbras – they are liars), accompanied by

'moody bitch' Lady Hugo on keyboards. Hugo doesn't speak. She just grimaces and rolls her eyes theatrically from beneath her tiara. Dalton's manservant, Jennifer, is a cheeky, camp little thing and there are glimpses of Pythonesque surrealism as he and Dalton squabble about nonsense or battle each other in a tongue-twister competition.

There are definite sags in the show where the bonkers humour goes a step too far. Dalton rubbing salsa sauce into his face while lounge music plink-plonks out of the Casio is one. But, overall, this is quirky, original and refreshingly politically incorrect. Like the best party host, Dalton ends up dragging you into the fun no matter how reluctant you are. *Claire Savers Until Aug 28, Southside (V82), 9pm. www.reluctantcabaret.com*



Dalton Trumbo: Crude laughs

THEATRE

Possession: Macbeth ★★★★★

To the Festival-addled body clock, any show before noon is usually too early to leave the duvet. No matter how hungover or fatigued you are, however, snoozing is impossible during Terri Power's exhilarating study of women and demons.

One of two productions at Edinburgh from Exeter's Shake-scene Players (the other a re-run of Power's Drag King Richard III), *Possession* is movement, masque and music as bracing as an Arctic blizzard.

Focusing on the 17th-century trial of Temperance Lloyd, Susanna Edwards and Mary Trembles – the last three women to be executed for witchcraft in England – this multi-layered piece features generous excerpts of Shakespearean dialogue, flickers of Brechtian wit and personal testimonies.

Making full use of the venue and luring the audience into the tale with quips and gestures, all five actors are skilled performers and storytellers.

While parallels made with the present day are clumsily made, Power's complex but smooth piece is a rich and vibrant indictment of the very literal demonisation of female autonomy. *Nadine McBay*

Tomorrow, Sweet Ego, (V204), Picardy Place, 10.55am. www.sweet-uk.net