

Calvinball



VENUE: Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh – John Hope Gateway
TIME: times vary, 5–27 Aug, not 8, 15, 22
TICKETS: £5

Who needs rules anyway? Certainly not Rhubarb and Custard, the irrespressible hosts of *Calvinball*, Ipdip Theatre's glorious show at the Royal Botanic Garden. And certainly not this audience of excited nought to five-year-olds, seated on blue tarpaulins in the dappled light under the trees.

Inspired by the game played by cartoon duo Calvin and Harris, in which you make up the rules as you go along, the show is essentially an opportunity to lark about in the sunshine (or otherwise, as the case may be – this is Scotland after all). This deceptively simple concept gives the three-strong cast the flexibility to be responsive to the particular needs of each audience, ensuring that *Calvinball* appeals to

a broad range of ages and interests. Games with props, songs and dances, hide and seek – even deciding on the physical boundaries of the game is an excuse for fun. There's novelty here, in the shape of original songs and plot devices, but enough familiar elements to ensure the experience is never overwhelming for even the youngest audience members.

There's too much faff getting started – Ipdip do their best to make checking tickets and giving out wristbands a cheery process, but that extra five-10 minutes before it all actually begins feels like an age for impatient under-fives. Once we get going though, the pace is fast without feeling rushed. If a particular game isn't to your taste, don't worry; there will be another one along in a minute. The three-strong cast keep a firm grip on proceedings—impressive given that there's no additional stage managerial support here—while still managing to engage directly with individual children and their parents. This game may have no rules, but it's got a whole lot of winners. ➔ [Jo Caird](#)



The Polar Bears Go Up



VENUE: Pleasance at EICC
TIME: times vary, 10–27 Aug, not 14, 21, 23
TICKETS: £8

From their cosy flat to deep space, *The Polar Bears Go Up* stages a small-scale odyssey to rescue a balloon, switching from everyday routine to a full-blown chase sequence across any and every form of transport.

The polar bears are a physically-

minded pair: powered by their senses, they sniff and snack their way around the stage. Affecting a big bear/little bear dynamic, Eilidh MacAskill and Fiona Manson create a cosy chemistry that makes for a real charmer of a show.

Lee Lyford's direction is largely choreographed to an immersive score by Greg Sinclair. With dialogue kept to a minimum, the music is communicative and invokes a playfulness as the bears go about their daily business, before taking on a dream-like quality on their discovery of the balloon. The show as a result is easily accessible to all ages, although on occasion

younger audience members may be confused as to what exactly is going on.

Once the bears are in pursuit of the runaway balloon is where the show really comes into its own. Props are used simply but effectively to show them scaling trees and taking cable cars to make their way higher into the sky (detailed on a height chart to map their progress). Despite the excitement of the chase, the play still feels very gentle, but MacAskill and Manson's stage presence is cheery and silly enough to keep the audience on board no matter where they go.

➔ [Louise Jones](#)