

Spencer Jones: The Herbert in Proper Job at Heroes @ The Hive

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Photo: David Bullivant



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A man with a basin-cut hairdo, wearing white tights and a lurid top, takes to the stage. Among his props are a baby face with lit-up red eyes, a chimp wearing a copper's hat and some disjointed limbs. He will hardly say a coherent sentence for the next hour. Is this comedy for everyone? Yes, it is, because in his clowning character creation, Spencer Jones has built one of the silliest, most consuming shows of the Fringe.

It's also one of the hardest to describe. Jones's stage persona Herbert combines the garbled speech of Tommy Cooper, the smiling enthusiasm of Brian Conley, and the naivety of Mr Bean. It sounds like an odd blend and at times you wonder if it can get any odder (a section in which he presents his baby is particularly nightmarish).

Yet, just as modern clowns including Doctor Brown and The Boy with Tape on His Face have reinvented clowning and produced near-silent shows that are torrents of imagination, so Jones is up in that bracket. He sweeps away audiences with the sheer joy of what he does, using his kitbag of astonishing props and elastic facial expressions. He's visually dazzling, donning a series of home-made cardboard eyes as he takes on various characters. And aurally, he's bringing so much into play, from his half-formed sentences, to "groan tubes" that moan when they move, and a loop pedal with which he builds some high-fun audience interaction.

The show is called *The Herbert in Proper Job* because it raises the viewpoint that this is not a fitting activity for a man in his late thirties, but this is unforgettably funny and visceral stuff that deserves

attention. It's unlikely that Jones will be off to the jobcentre any time soon.
Box office: 0131 226 0000, to Aug 31

Review link:

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/arts/stage/comedy/article4537874.ece>