

# Arch8 - Erik Kaiel

## Shows from home and abroad light up Imagine

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It's Tuesday morning in Edinburgh; and in the main auditorium at the Traverse, an audience of secondary school students are waiting for the show to begin.

On stage, there are three performer-dancers from the Netherlands group Arch 8 Dance; they are dancing already, as we wait, as if in slow motion.

Once the show begins in earnest, though, the audience are swept along on a tide of choreography so intense and inventive that an hour seems to pass in a few minutes; for Erik Kaiel's O Snap is a terrific piece of dance about what it means to be a teenager now, created with huge precision through the bodies of Kim Jomi Fischer and Ryan Djokokarso – the big bloke and the smaller bloke – and Denise Klevering, the young woman. There's competition, there's play, there are vicious fights, there is ganging-up, both trivial and serious; as well as a moving sense of how teenagers both yearn for intimacy, and desperately resist it, as a threat to their emerging individuality.

O Snap, in others words, is exactly the kind of international show that has always been the life and soul of Scotland's Imagine Festival of performing arts for children and young people; and this week, Imagine celebrates its 25th edition with yet another packed programme, featuring more than a dozen shows from Scotland, England, Germany, Australia, Norway, the Netherlands, and Denmark. For older children, there's plenty of work which – like O Snap – deals with issues of identity and security; a fine companion piece to O Snap is the Glasgow-based Barrowland Ballet's Tiger Tale, in which choreographer Natasha Gilmore and her three dancers – with co-director Rob Evans, designer Fred Pommerehn and musician Kim Moore – imagine a family trapped in joyless daily urban routine being shocked back into awareness of the danger and beauty of life by an encounter with a tiger.

And as well as inviting fine international work to Edinburgh, and showcasing the best of Scottish shows for young audiences, Imagine also now seeks to encourage and commission co-productions between Scottish companies and international partners. Andy Manley of the Scottish group Starcatchers, and Ania Michaelis of the German company o.N., offer the gorgeous A Small Story/Eine Kleine Geschichte, in which two people are haunted, entertained and changed by the strange noises coming from all the household goods that surround them on Fred Pommerehn's magical set, and by the personalities these objects acquire. This show seemed to me perfect for two year-olds, who were completely enthralled.

And then there's Grandad And Me, a tremendously moving show from the new Glasgow-based company The Letter J, about a little girl moving around her much-loved Grandad's living room, remembering the fun they had before her Grandad's death took him away. Grandad And Me depends on a rich and steady interaction between the show's beautiful design and animation, the live sound, music and voices provided by co-creators Judith Williams and Jon Bishop, and the central performance of Marta Masiero as the little girl; and although it's perhaps a little clever and allusive for the average five year-old, it struck me as perfect for those around seven or eight, who are beginning to deal with the idea of death and loss.

Grandad And Me continues until Monday, along with a weekend programme that also includes a the gorgeous Australian/Italian co- production Saltbush, an interactive journey through the culture and landscape of Aboriginal Australia. Imagine seems as fine and varied a festival as ever; and as essential to the future of a Scottish children's theatre scene that it has helped to transform, over the years, into something of a leader in the field – although one full of theatre-makers who know that they still have plenty to learn, from their colleagues across Europe and the world.