

Watch Me Fall Edinburgh review

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Chuck Yeager, the test pilot and American aviation legend who first broke the sound barrier, is encapsulated in the final pages of Tom Wolfe's *The Right Stuff* as a flaming figure dropping from the sky, a human comet with a tail of silk, suckered by gravity. Ejected from a jet travelling at twice the speed of sound, his parachute became entangled in his ejector seat and his face started to melt as he fell. Wolfe's 'master of the sky' had been brought down to earth, but he survived to fly again and one of the book's abiding images is of this molten man striding across the sand, unvanquished.

Men like Yeager, and daredevil stuntman Evel Knievel, provide the inspiration behind Action Hero's *Watch Me Fall*. The company are interested in what it is to strive, to rise, to fail, to fall; to launch oneself into the unknown, come through the other side, broken, bloody, scarred, and then do it all over again. A black track has been etched in the floor of the Summerhall Dissecting Room and on this track James Stenhouse and Gemma Paintin prepare to recreate Knievel's Caesar Palace fountain jump with just a child's bike, a crash helmet and a plentiful supply of Coca-Cola. The stunt itself is almost an afterthought; the piece exists in the hype, the build, the whoop and roar of the crowd. She wears a star-spangled dress, he's clad in a red T-shirt and jeans; together they work the audience, charging them up, stoking the sense of anticipation, that we are about to witness An Event.

A number of audience members have already been given disposable cameras by this point, with which to record proceedings and the room is filled with the intermittent click and flare of their bulbs, paparazzi starbursts, pin-pricks of white light. Stenhouse begins by setting his helmet on fire before batting the air with his hands to whip up the crowd. He holds aloft two bottles of Coca-Cola, like plastic trophies, or a pair of liquid dumbbells, his arm muscles taught in a show of strength. He then proceeds to pour the contents down Paintin's throat, the wet stuff spilling down her front, staining her dress, gagging her, stinging her eyes. It rapidly ceases to be funny, becomes sickly and unsettling, a reminder that where there is an almost foolhardy level of courage and bravado there is also often a corresponding selfishness and disregard; in this way the piece chimes with that other memorable scene from Wolfe's book, the opening tableau of waiting wives, flinching at every phone-call, every knock at the door; these are the women left to lip-bite on the sidelines as their husbands hurl themselves into the sky, again and again and again.

It's this impulse, this compulsion, to keep taking leaps that Action Hero is exploring. That and the messy edges of spectacle, the hollow echo beneath the buzz of the crowd; if the whole thing fizzles slightly before its 50 minutes is up, it's kind of apt.

Finally Stenhouse takes up his tiny bike and rides, hits the ramp, tips, tumbles, sprawls. It's abrupt, clumsy: over. And while he doesn't soar, nor does he melt.