

# Wrecking Ball at Edinburgh festival review – cunning look at celebrity and the male gaze

4 / 5 stars

**Forest Fringe, Edinburgh**

Action Hero's entertaining show about a celebrity on a photoshoot draws us in as observers, participants and accomplices



Horribly real ... Action Hero's Gemma Paintin and James Stenhouse in Wrecking Ball. Photograph: Action Hero/Forest Fringe

[Lyn Gardner](#)

Action Hero's show Frontman presented us with [a rock diva being gradually undermined](#) by a stagehand, then dismantled the myth they've created before our eyes. In this latest show, which no doubt takes its title from Miley Cyrus's 2013 music video by [controversial photographer Terry Richardson](#), we watch a myth being constructed during a photoshoot with a female celebrity (played by [Gemma Paintin](#)).

She is bored and distant. The photographer, meanwhile, seems affable, and invites the audience to take a beer. We may even start to like him, and perhaps think he is a reasonably smart man dealing with a dumb blonde. Language is slippery and can be used to manipulate; here the audience, like the celebrity-struck consumer, happily buy into what is being presented to us.

Action Hero, who cleverly play on the act of theatre and its suspensions of disbelief, make us complicit in this cunningly constructed and entertaining show. We look at her through his eyes, and we are implicated. Even the ice cream looks seductive, even though we know it's made from pink mashed potato. We don't only believe it's real, we also would like it to be real. "I just want to be myself," says the celebrity. But how can we be ourselves if we can no longer distinguish between reality and fantasy? And if we so easily allow our lives to be authored by others?

James Stenhouse plays the photographer. He wears Richardson's trademark plaid shirt. There is a constant tension between the real and the artificial: "Are you wearing a costume?" the celebrity

enquires. A script suddenly appears and the audience has words put into their mouths. As with the celebrity, the moment for consent has been lost – we are past the point of refusal.

“I didn’t expect to have to do any acting,” reads a member of the audience. “No one is doing any acting,” Stenhouse replies tersely. Too right. This is horribly real.