



Histrionics on the high seas

FESTIVAL COMEDY

A Somewhat Accurate History of Pirates
 (1550-2017)

Andrew McClelland
 Beck's Music Box
 Review: Ali Taulbut

Resplendent in woolly tank top and plaid pants and accompanied by the joyful musical strains of a Gilbert and Sullivan ditty, Andrew McClelland is an easy performer to like.

His show, A Somewhat Accurate History of Pirates, is quite a vintage piece by comedy standards. Although it was four years in the making and first performed five years ago, the show is as fresh as a pirate on shore leave.

Armed with a big screen and Powerpoint software, McClelland talks, sings, illustrates and animates his way through some of history's most colourful buccaneers and their legends. The meat of the comedic material is sandwiched in the conceit of a mock university lecture — a device that felt a little redundant but once we had moved on from that, McClelland's infectious enthusiasm was able to work its magic and history became riveting as well as funny.

There is something reminiscent of Eddie Izzard in McClelland's occasional tail away from script into a James Mason-voiced internal ponder and he shows a seasoned stand-up performer's ability to think on his feet. His passion for pirates and for history in general is palpable. In a recent interview he remarked: "I do not understand how people can't be



Easy to like: Andrew McClelland.

interested in history. It's got everything you could ever want you know — sex, violence, intrigue, romance."

All of which is in evidence regarding McClelland's favourite pirate, Henry Morgan. The energy and pace soars during his story. It's an heroic tale of piracy of epic proportions brought to vivid life through cut-out puppets, audience stooges and several huge bags of party poppers. (The poppers were distributed around the audience to represent the gunfire during Morgan's devastating siege on the Caribbean forts of Portobello.)

The outward simplicity of the performance belies the extensive research and it is this juxtaposition that gives the comedy its depth; any less substance would have rendered the comedy flimsy and frivolous. McClelland really taps into the audience's collective inner child and leaves you wanting much more history.