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# Dispatches from The Fringe – Beware the charms of a Stoneybatter strangler

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The Curious Case of The Stoneybatter Strangler  
Maylin Productions

## The Curious Case of The Stoneybatter Strangler

Rating: ★★★★★

Stoneybatter, Dublin, during the 1780's. A thief has taken to murdering ordinary, working class girls in the night for their hard earned coin. In all cases a baby is heard crying in a ditch, along with a sound like steel scraping along the ground followed by a thump in the dark. The police have advised all young women to stay off the streets after nightfall. This is the tale of Billy in the Bowl, a handsome but legless beggar who dragged himself about in a cast iron bowl, living off the kindness of strangers until he turned to murder. *The Curious Case of The Stoneybatter Strangler* contains all the ingredients for a truly chilling experience, but this site-specific piece never rises above being a tame tale of terror.

The journey begins at Christophe's Café in Jameson Courtyard where a street urchin, under the guidance of an older, Fagin-like beggar, works the crowd for coin. This impudent pup is taken to

task by his mother who warns all the drunkards and scoundrels present to take shelter in nearby St. Michan's Church. In the church graveyard we encounter a night watchman, a gravedigger and the ghosts of three dead women before being escorted inside to witness the grim details of the murders as the tale plays out to its conclusion.

Writer and director Andrea Cleary's script labors select points, such as the details of the murders and Billy as a handsome, *monsstrum naturae* (freak of nature) abandoned by society. These details, constantly repeated by different characters, limited the scope and diminished the impact of the story. Her choice of St. Michan's Church was inspired and period costumes also added to the atmosphere. There were some promising moments, such as the ghost singing, beckoning the audience to follow her. But these were offset by less satisfying moments. The use of blurred shadow puppets to show the murder looked tacky and the final reveal felt like being had by a cheap trick. Performances throughout were solid, with Elga Fox as Moira and Shane Casey as the Grounds Man being particularly notable, but many were obscured by too large a crowd cramped around tight spaces.

*The Curious Case of The Stoneybatter Strangler* is an opportunity missed wherein its most exciting and charming aspects are the location in which it is set and the pop historical details it contains. Its tale of terror and death may sound inviting, but the end result is as about as shocking and substantial as a seaside, carnival ghost train.

Maylin Production's, *The Curious Case of The Stoneybatter Strangler* runs twice nightly until September 21st. Performances begin at 7.00 p.m. and 9.00 p.m. at Christophe's Café, the Jameson Courtyard. Admission is €12.00



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