

# SCREW THE FOOTLIGHTS, I WANTED THE REVUE ANYWAY

ROBIN MORRIS FIGHTS DURHAM'S CORNER

As I found my seat at Comedyfest, I had a minor epiphany. It suddenly occurred to me that the Durham Revue can offer us something we're sorely lacking up here on the Wear: a sense of identity. In a university defined as much by its attempts to be *Oxbridge North* as anything distinctively Durham, we really don't have much which we can share and call our own. I began to wonder if the Revue might be our last and best hope for inter-collegiate small talk.

They've been around forever, they're lodged in the university's consciousness and they've got 'Durham' right there in the name. Need a sense of belonging? Send in the clowns. And where better to send them in than Comedyfest, headlining a show featuring The Cambridge Footlights and the Oxford Revue, the sketch comedy personifications of our overachieving Oxbridge cousins. We might not have got in, but at least we can vicariously outshine those who did.

Completing the bill were The Penny Dreadfuls, an act composed of former university comics who have now 'made it' and have got a series on BBC Radio Seven. You can't even get that on FM - by God, boys and girls, give them one from me.

**“If I was to pin my sense of belonging on our very own comedic crack troops, I wanted to be pretty sure they were going to come out of it looking good.”**

The Footlights were first on, exhibiting impressive charisma and confidence. Perhaps a couple of their sketches may have benefited from an extra pinch of concision, but my frankly inadequate attention span might well be to blame

here. All in all, good times – but nothing that couldn't be handled by our Revue's droll band of brothers and sisters, I was sure.



Second up, and bringing in the interval: The Penny Dreadfuls. Here my hopes of our lot leaving the rest of the bill in the shade rather dimmed; their experience showed as they lit up the Ballroom with a distinctive brand of what might be best described as unhinged post-Victoriana. Even with this deliberate stylistic constraint, they never seemed to lack ideas, producing a series of sketches grounded in strong concepts and punctuated with excellent lines. If the Footlights had charisma, the Dreadfuls had it by the (wrought iron, nineteenth-century) bathtub.

This led me on to a corollary to this whole “uniting Durham” business; if I was to pin my sense of belonging on our very own comedic crack troops, I wanted to be pretty sure they were going to come out of it looking good. Comedyfest didn't come at the best time for the Revue. In recent months they've seen the departure of their longest standing member, a slating in the pages of *Palatinate* and, rumour would have it, some tensions within the group. As the interval ended and we headed once more unto the breach, I was reminded of the task facing Henry

the Fifth at Agincourt. Though possibly that was just me getting carried away.

As the Durham Revue were headlining, the Oxford Revue opened the second half. The strongest student comedy I've seen has tended to feature healthy doses of pop-cultural references, and throwing Pokemon and Poddington Peas lyrics into the context of Shakespearian tragedy instantly won the Oxonians some fans. As their set ended, things were dramatically poised for our own Revue's grand finale.

**“When the girl in front of me interrupted a sketch referencing the war poets to ask who Wilfred Owen was, I felt obligated to give the back of her head a truly vicious glaring”**

Out they came; our heroes, our icons. I gave them each a proud nod, full of camaraderie, as they walked onto the stage. It seemed to go unnoticed - presumably they were deep in concentration. They didn't sweep the competition before them in a blaze of sketch-based glory, but they did get the laughs we expected, and when they didn't it may have been because their sketches were a bit highbrow. When a girl in front of me interrupted a sketch referencing the war poets to ask her friend who Wilfred Owen was, I felt obligated to give the back of her head a truly vicious glaring.

English degree-based cleverness, some wonderfully awful puns and an element of pure physicality proved to be a potent mix. By the end of Comedyfest I was proud to be a Durhamite. It was the Penny Dreadfuls who stole the show, but, fortunately for our egos, the hometown favourites stole our hearts.