

## Mark Brown's theatre: Beautiful theatre – with strings attached



**Puppet theatre sits on the margins of Scottish theatre culture. However, as Mark Brown discovers at the FIAMS festival in Quebec, puppetry offers a world of wonders.**

As the Edinburgh festivals get into full swing, the focus tends to be on the 4 big name comedians and actors. Little attention is given to puppet theatre. A relatively neglected art form throughout the UK, puppetry is more celebrated in other countries, not least in Quebec, as the wonderful, biennial programme of FIAMS (Saguenay International Festival of Puppet Arts) attests. (...)

The outstanding show of this year's FIAMS programme was, for my money, *Le Cirque Orphelin*, by Quebecois company *Les Sages Fous*. Highly original, beautifully quirky, sometimes disconcerting and, often, very funny, it creates, in a room that is the quintessence of dilapidated urbanism, a miniature circus of vagabond artists.

The *Equilibrist*, for example, is a puppet comprised of only a head and two arms, who performs brilliant acrobatics. He is joined by a high-octane character who zooms around in a wheelchair and a besotted, male figure who, ultimately, achieves his dream of swimming in the circus aquarium with the seductive mermaid.

The piece enjoys superb, atmospheric music and sound, excellent lighting and charmingly distinctive puppets. Most impressively, it brings all of these elements together in a memorably consistent aesthetic. (...)