

Tom Ward
Monkey Barrel

4 Stars

Rocking up to this year's Fringe with his unmistakably indie haircut, and wearing an out-of-season cagoule, Tom Ward walks out into the packed Monkey Barrel room as the final chorus of *Survivor's Eye of the Tiger* blares from the speakers. From one anthem to another, Ward launches into his side-splitting new hour of stand-up comedy, *Anthem*. Exploring themes of identity, such as class, sexuality, and mental health, alongside broader topics such as the climate crisis and advertising, Ward brings his whimsical observational eye to many of the big issues of our day. Imaginative, mischievous, and yet gleefully authentic, *Anthem* was a rock-solid hour of comedy in a very crowded field.

Opening with a house-share based call and response song – belted to-and-fro at an increasingly rapid tempo – Ward quickly warmed the audience to his humour, which brings a silly wit to his otherwise gloomy observations. Staking his claim as being a man of the “Sports Direct mug owning people”, Ward no doubt establishes himself as an extremely likeable, and relatable, performer. That the audience agreed was made immediately clear by how they rallied behind him as he was forced to chuck-out three girls and their picnic. At first humouring these rowdy Saturday night hecklers with a quick-witted ease, Ward showed a gracious professionalism as he eventually pushed for them to leave the show, to the hearty applause of the audience.

Quickly bouncing back, Ward launches into a well-timed set, free from disruption. From a bit on how bad-vegan cakes are responsible for the trauma response reaction which keeps the dairy industry alive, to a well-acted skit on the ‘victimhood Olympics’ which played out between himself and a girl he met at a party, Ward brings an absurdist twist to a host of well-covered topics. Blending his comedy with musical prompts and sound effects, the shows strongest moment comes as he critiques the greenwashing of advertising agencies. Performing his own ludicrously friendly advertising jingle for Shell, Ward strips back the immoral powers of advertisers trying to convince us we’re helping the planet. He also chucks in a very good Michael McIntyre for good measure.

Proving his flair for the unexpected, Ward ends the show with a surreal audience interaction, which has a man called Chris donning a wig replica of Ward’s own hair and joining him on stage to answer a series of random questions. From these, Ward creates an improvised anthem tailored to Chris, which the two then attempt to perform as a duet. A daring end, his boldness certainly paid off in our case, as the two created a strange, but very, very funny, final set. A back up perhaps, if this audience interaction hadn’t hit, Ward closes the show with an unusual, but somehow very fitting, audience-wide rendition of Cher’s *Believe*. Truly, an anthem for our times, Ward is well worth catching on his tour later this year.

Tom Ward will be touring the show later this year.
Photo Credit: Matt Crockett

