

Shantify



“You are easily impressed & I love it” – but not as impressed as I was hoping to be.

Having seen such smash-hit productions as *The Choir of Man* and Jethro Compton’s *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, I walked into the Edinburgh Fringe Festival’s *Shantify* expecting to unreservedly enjoy what I was about to witness. And I did, but sadly, not as much as I had hoped to. Whilst the cast of *Shantify* do a good job at delivering an exciting show, their shanty-style interpretations of smash hits never quite hit their mark.

Adding a nautical touch to everything from Dolly Parton to *SIX The Musical*, the performers are unafraid to challenge the status quo in their quest for sea-worthy songs, tackling the widest range of music imaginable & turning it into their own soundtrack, complemented by strong harmonies from the cast. Whilst this was enjoyable to see & to witness the creativity borne out, it was tempered by the lack of live orchestration & the limited use of instruments on stage by the actors, besides a few notable moments.

It is understandable that the costs of Fringe may have been prohibitive, in theory, but seeing the snaking line around the 450-seat venue, likely filled day after day, feels like cutting corners as opposed to making necessary decisions. It is unclear whether the recorded music was performed by the cast, or anyone involved in the show for that matter, which reduced the depth & impact the creative pieces then had.

That being said, other elements come together well to craft an immersive & engaging environment throughout. From being encouraged to clap & stamp your feet – an awe-inspiring sound when 450 people are doing this in unison – to the incredibly dramatic lighting design & integration of comedy & audience participation, the backstage elements synergise well to elevate the performances given by the cast.

To really hit a higher mark, this production needs to lean even more heavily into its subject matter – the pieces that worked best were the ones that fully embraced & leant into the ‘shanty’ aspect, drawing upon stamping feet, actor-musicians & using the echoing space to its advantage. One such example was the rendition of ‘From Now On’, with its initial choruses seizing me into a state of pure adulation; if they can bottle that & replicate it across the rest of the discography, the rest of the score may be elevated just that much.

Shantify is a lot of fun & is certainly a worthy production to bear witness to, but your enjoyment will be tempered if you have ever seen anything of a similar style before. The musical interpretations fail to garner the strength & passion of the originals, with shantified emphasis placed at the wrong points & a weak plot being a tentative ‘link’ between them all. But on a surface-level, *Shantify* remains an entertaining way to spend an hour, and the creativity on display is enjoyable for all, as evidenced by the hundreds of people packed into Assembly’s Palais du Variété. So jump on deck, get your toes ready to tap & “whoop away that sadness” for an afternoon of enjoyment.