Arts & Theatre

In Conversation
Theatre Critic & Influencer Mickey-Jo Boucher

Sophie Layton (she/her)


Credit: Mickey-Jo Boucher

In an increasingly diversified media landscape, many critics find themselves having no impact on their audiences besides a numerical star rating at the bottom of the page. But some are bucking this trend, bringing a new variety into criticism of the arts, with none exemplifying this better than the mastermind behind the biggest social media theatre platform – Mickey-Jo Boucher.

Mickey-Jo Boucher, the founder of MickeyJoTheatre is a content creator, influencer and theatre critic, behind the channel which boasts over 75,000 subscribers. Boucher is breathing new life into his criticism, focusing on video essays and explainers to bring his content to viewers worldwide. An accredited theatre critic covering productions the West End, Broadway, Edinburgh Fringe Festival and around the world, Boucher is a University of Surrey graduate and former mathematics teacher, becoming a critic in the years following the Covid-19 pandemic.

Given his unusual journey into theatre criticism, I began by asking how Mickey-Jo Boucher came to be in the role he now finds himself. "I think accidentally is the short answer. Theatre is always something that I've loved and when I came up with Mickey Jo-Theatre, it was just because I needed a username for Instagram [...] At the time I would go and see stuff, I would talk about it briefly on social media and then around about late 2019, 2020, I started making more YouTube videos. And then that kind of led to [...] where I am now".

But whilst MickeyJoTheatre is thriving, much of the cultural criticism space is failing to reach audiences as extensively as it once did. When asked whether it was due to changing audience attitudes, he instead focused on the media type itself: "Print journalism is suffering and I think traditional theatrical criticism along with it. People still engage with the reviews but I think there is a benefit to meeting people where they are and a lot of dialogue and discourse that happens on social media platforms".

"Because it's my face, because it's conversational, you can infer tone from what I'm saying. That's harder to do from a written review. There's something inherently more personal. So I think I'm easier to connect to". But could it be just a lack of audience merit now being placed on long-form reviews? Boucher doesn't think so: "People still care about each other's creative responses to something and finding out if they're likely to enjoy something, especially with ticket prices going in the direction that they're going, I think people do still care about reviews".

Mickey-Jo Boucher is also much more than just a critic, with presenter and performer additional skills he has honed over several years. For those of us who have created theatre ourselves, we know just how much this can alter our own viewpoints, and Boucher is no exception: "Since starting to put together monthly live cabaret shows, [...] it does give me a lot more respect and understanding to producers of everything that they are wrangling and contending with".

"I think it does shift your perspective on certain things. It always offers you that little bit more insight into certain things; you understand a little bit more the work that's gone into things [...] For so many of these shows, for almost everything, these new producers really believe in this work and they think they have the next *Hamilton*. And so it becomes a little bit harder [...] you see more of the picture".

And his support of smaller, independent thespians extends far beyond the West End. With the Edinburgh Fringe on its way, and our own Sheffield University Theatre Company (SUTCo) sending their original play *Peace Circle* there in a matter of months, Boucher reflected on the important, yet underappreciated role student theatre and creators play in bringing an event such as Fringe to life: "Student theatre companies and the Edinburgh Fringe is always a big part of my calendar. It's I wish I could devote more time to plucky new theatre like that the year round. I think it's very difficult".

"I play the same game that [everyone] is playing where they need the clicks [...] The shows that need reviews for them to see audiences, sales and just exposure are not the shows that we need, but the shows that we need don't really need us. So it's this sort of unspoken understanding of this symbiotic relationship", which he believes makes reviewing upcoming work at the Fringe not only difficult, but essential to promoting the cultural figures of the future.

He also highlighted the importance of "being authentic to yourself", which he believes is often lacking in mainstream theatre journalism: "We don't have to fall into the same kind of patterns and saying the same things every time [...] There's five or six sentences that you hear in a bunch of reviews that make me cringe because it's the kind of thing you say that is just very generic. I would love to know why you connected to it".

Read the full interview on the Forge Press website



Credit: Mickey-Jo Theatre



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