

# TIMES ONLINE

Where am I? Home Arts & Entertainment Specials **Edinburgh**  
From The Times

August 13, 2008

## Pajama Men: Versus Vs Versus at the Assembly Rooms, Edinburgh



Dominic Maxwell

RECOMMEND?



Funny how close the gap can be between a bad festival and a good one. A couple of nights ago, a few comedy critics huddled together and agreed that 2008 was not a vintage year. Too few surprises. Too little depth. And then I saw Versus vs Versus, one of the most dazzling displays of comedy theatre I've ever seen, and things looked up. When Pajama Men were nominated for a Perrier Best Newcomer Award, under the name Sabotage, they were hard work but worth it. Four years later the Americans Shenoa Allen and Mark Chavez have taken their extraordinary physical skill, quirky character-play and narrative complexity and added to it a new commitment to the laugh.

The result? Pure joy, when it could be insufferable. They're acting on a bare stage in bare feet and pyjamas, they're jumping between scenes and characters with outlandish virtuosity, they're even backed by a sensitive guitarist with Jeff Beck hair.

Pretentious, eux? But this ain't art, it's show business. One second they are a pair of knights, chopping off thumbs and feuding about who's rescuing a princess; the next they are a pair of wiseacre newsreaders; a father and daughter on the run; a chess-playing bat, New Age women: "It was a hard time. I was in aromatherapy for six months." They let you know in a gesture which character they've become; who's doing what unlikely thing to whom. And they throw out tight, twisty gags - "People Against Picket Signs," intones a newsreader, "can't seem to figure out how to protest picket signs." What's the story? Well, strap yourself in: it's only at the end that you see how this time-travelling mock-epic links up, and even then you'll miss some joins. But I was too busy feeling blessed by its loving ingenuity to worry too much about that. It's improv meets vaudeville, Pina Bausch meets the Mighty Boosh. It's weird. And it's wonderful.

AS IT HAPPENED



[Live chat with comedian Stewart Lee](#)

EDINBURGH 60  
SECOND COMEDY  
VIDEOS



[Doc Brown: The Archers meets hip hop](#)

Rapper-turned-comedian's sinister take on popular radio



[Magic comedy: Pete Firman](#)

Fuses tricks with comedy: and a hammer with his face



[Phil Nichol's ode to blind love](#)

Canadian comic's turn as Helen Keller's fella



[Paul Sinha stand-up](#)

Former GP's perilous

Times Onlin

SEARCH

MOST READ

MOST COMMENTED

MOST CURIOUS

TODAY

Caster Semenya, woman who rocked athletics...

Derren Brown: rumours swirl about lottery...

Moment of indecision by Taleban gunman saved...

Tibetan Mastiff is 'most expensive' dog...