

Evening News, Edingburgh June 4 2004

... It was two solo puppet shows that really captivated the imaginations of their audiences. The first of these was Portofino-Ballade by Swiss actor Peter Rinderknecht. At the outset it seemed as if all his show consisted of was some very charming chit-chat with the audience, and a spot of double bass playing.

But things were far from what they seemed. Halfway through his first tune on the double bass, a tiny cuckoo came out of a little door in the front of the instrument to strike the time. From here, his imagination run riot.

The Scotsman, June 4 2004

.... The fascinating Portofino-Ballade from Switzerland is definitely up to the festival's usual high standards. It has fragments of a story, but Peter Rinderknecht never lets them get in the way of the general atmosphere – one of regret and loss. It's a poignant story, but the performance is very funny. Rinderknecht presents himself as a velvet-clad double bass soloist, and he plays loudly with rock'n'roll panache: "Give it to me baby, yeah". He doesn't so much start the show as just wander into it, meandering over several topics, such as his choice of hairdo, and talking a call on his mobile: "They are all staring at me, what shall I do?" Then a cuckoo pops out of the apparently ordinary double bass, which suddenly reveals it to be full of little doors and shutters. The cuckoo is actually a tiny man living in a serviceable little flat at the back of the instrument. Being a cuckoo is his life's work and with grim professionalism he dons his costume hourly, prepares his voice, attaches himself to the safety strap and "cuckoo!" The cuckoo man is only six inches tall but Rinderknecht invests him with such dour personality and fine movements that we are instantly enthralled by his minute but very dull life. But puppetry is tiring work and we discover that the double bass is not just a doll's house, but it also contains a Gaggia coffee machine and a little fridge which provide a wee break for the performer and also transport us to Portofino for a short Italian holiday.

There is an underlying theme about difficult communications between fathers and sons which cleverly fits itself together between snatches of gravely songs and whimsical conversations with the audience. While it's a little cerebral for very small children, those over eight will love it and parents will be intrigued too. I just want to know how he gets any music out of a double bass that's so full.