

The box-office joke backfires

Festival diary

John Vidal

ONE of the best shows on the Fringe is spotting the dismal faces of the comedy producers. It has been an unhappy start for many of the big buck shows which are used to raking in obscene profits. Recession, say some; ridiculous prices, say the punters who are now being asked a minimum of a fiver and up to £8 for little more than an hour of mirth; and, truly cynically, an extra £1.50 or more for weekend shows. The Fringe says tickets are up slightly on last year but these are advance sales and mean very little.

DORIS Lessing has been in town for a reading of her new novel and Waterstones' staff naturally fawned over her when she ran in, somewhat agitated, just before she was due on stage. Madame headed straight for her own dump bin, drew out the Golden Notebook and ran off. Seems she left her script behind and was reduced to reading out old faves.

THE Assembly Rooms are plagued with false fire alarms and sure enough the late night audiences were turfed into the street at the weekend to allow the yellow hats to strut their stuff. This deeply affected radical Marxist sex kitten drag queen Lily Savage, who was found in micro skirt and thigh length pvc boots all over the crew of Tender 49.

THE first diary award for non performance this year goes to Peruvian novelist-politico Mario Vargas Llosa who is ill in Spain. The second is for the 19 young balalaika players from the Soviet Union who have fallen foul of the visa authorities and are languishing in Moscow desperate to bring some life to the Pleasance.

MEANWHILE, the cast of Glad — the show which pushed Edinburgh's derelict and homeless on to the stage last year — are revelling in their new fame. Fated in Germany, off to the US and justifiably proud of their achievements, they have the air of seasoned performers now. "So have you been to any other theatre in the last year?" one stalwart of the company was asked in rehearsals yesterday. "Nah. I'm not into this play stuff. What have plays got to do with living? I prefer to do it myself".

ARCHAOS are welcomed to Leith like old friends; meanwhile producer Adrian Evans reports harrowing meetings with Lambeth Council in London who are fighting tooth and claw to prevent him bringing the circus south. Insurance rates for the company have risen 1,500 percent since last year, Evans says. "This is the last year we play in Britain." Out on the Meadows, Circus Oz is frantically rushing in a replacement for Annie Davey, the performer who broke her neck and both her wrists at the weekend when she fell off a pole during a press call. Happily there seems to be no neurological damage.