



Gargantua by Carl Grose

presented by norfox, directed by Rosie Stuart and Josh Azouz

Reviewed by Simon Belt August 2012

The **norfox Young People's Theatre Company** is the Library Theatre's resident theatre company for young people aged between 15-18, designed to give them valuable experience in developing their skills in a professional theatre environment. As the Library Theatre is in-between homes, this performance was hosted at the Manchester Metropolitan University's [Capitol Theatre](#), a performance space for students on their acting courses within the Faculty of Art and Design.

The plot attempts to consider what would happen if a baby from skankton were to take over a city. It starts with Mrs Mungus who, after a two and a half year pregnancy, gives birth to Hugh Mungus - a monster baby with an accelerated growth rate and insatiable appetite for anything that moves! Dastardly military scientists set their hearts on cloning an army of supersize babies for mischievous ends from Hugh Mungus who shakes off his chains and stages a daring escape. We are encouraged to consider who or what can stop this oversized freak of nature, whether the military are the good guys or monsters themselves, and drawn into wondering what the fate of the oversized baby should be.



The **norfox** have a difficult task of trying to nurture the writing, acting and production skills of a young and developing group of teenagers who are experimenting through the theatre. And this production certainly had all the trappings of a well-crafted theatre performance, with some clever choreography, but lacked the clincher of an engaging script to tell a convincing story through. The exploration of that tension between the generations and trying to grasp the moments and determinants involved in growing from children (well rapidly growing baby) into adulthood is a storyline that will be worked and reworked with each new generation. It's not an easy one to grasp from the vantage point of young people, and this play fails to grasp anything

particularly useful or insight from what I could see.

I do add the caveat that I didn't spot anything particularly insightful or incisive, as I could quite easily have missed it, as the play moved through its scenes with a pace that was quite extraordinary, with prop changes seemingly whenever they could be added. Quite what led to such a fast pace of a play I'm not too sure - it may have been driven by the teenagers acting in it, or it could have been an attempt by the adults around to keep the pace and tempo going to cover for the lack of depth in the script - I'm not quite sure, but I don't feel that it added anything to my experience. Notable, was the dramatic use of some spunkie numbers from an era when there really was something of a youth culture, which did fit the pace very well.

The musical backdrop indicates a much older influence behind the scenes in the production, so why couldn't that have been brought to bear in tightening up the story to have more purpose and structure? From the expressions of those involved in the acting, I'm quite sure that everyone was exhilarated by the whole experience, which will also have been extremely rewarding, educational and insightful. When I was a teenager, I went to a drama school event in my summer holidays which I got a tremendous amount out of, so can imagine a professional setup like this will be a stunningly terrific experience for those involved.

