



**[How to relax in Andalucia](#) by John Waterhouse**

**[Buxton Fringe Festival](#) , directed by Darren Holness**

**Reviewed by [Yvonne Cawley](#) July 2012**

I've lived in the High Peak for 12 years, but I must admit that even though I knew of the existence of the Buxton Fringe, and have heard people talking about how diverse, professional and entertaining the programme of events are, I've never actually been to anything or even looked at what's on offer (tut, tut!) – until now that is. For those of you who don't know, or have never been to the Fringe (shame on you!! – see I can say that now I've been), it began in 1980 to run concurrently with the world-renowned Buxton Festival, with its international opera and high profile literary talks at its core.

The Fringe provides a showcase for performers and artists of all kinds and utilises a variety of different venues. Dance, drama, music, poetry, comedy, film, exhibitions and magic are just some of the forms that have appeared. And the Fringe Committee doesn't undertake any selection, censorship, financing or selective promotion of individual events and aim to promote and encourage an atmosphere where artists can take risks and experiment with their art – whatever form it takes. So why doesn't Manchester have a similarly independent and vibrant fringe festival - too many of nanny's apron strings maybe?

So why this year, and why this comedy in particular? Well, a few months ago, along with my husband, I attended a cracking little play at the Three Minute Theatre in Manchester called '[Shades of Diva](#)' (click to read review), and after the show we got chatting to various members of the cast and crew. Nicole Gaskell who brilliantly portrayed the character of the sour and unsupportive mother in that play, mentioned that she was going to be performing in a comedy called ***How to relax in Andalucia*** as part of the Buxton Fringe Festival. She encouraged us to go see her in this production to prove that she can do 'funny' as well as 'uptight and miserable' – mind you I hasten to add that Nicole has a delightful and friendly personality off-stage, already proving what a great actress she is.



The play was performed in the [Buxton Community School](#)'s Drama Studio which was perfect

for the occasion - compact and kitted out with professional lighting, sound and fairly comfortable seating. Before going into the Studio, the audience gathered in what appeared to be a School Hall, where complementary drinks (soft ones only as this was a school) and biscuits were laid on. It was a nice touch as it gave us all chance to sit and chat with other members of the audience, the majority of whom I spoke to being regular "Fringers".

The audience was mainly made up of the 'over 40's', me included, and the only reason I mention this is because I have just read another review that suggests that this play "would appeal to a more mature audience who prefer their comedies to be gentle on the ear". If this means the play contains no profanities, bleeding heart revelations or a constant, non-stop machine gun delivery of lines or jokes then yep, this is probably correct, but as one of the 'older lot' give me that any day. Also, John Waterhouse the writer, has listed 1960s and 1970s British comedy as his special interest and I can see his obvious enthusiasm of this era permeating through this production.

How to Relax in Andalucia is not quite 'Carry-Onesque' but it was reminiscent of the kinds of TV comedy programmes I grew up with (what I call 'proper' comedy) with a little bit of slapstick thrown in (although I did think that particular scene was a little bit over-the-top). There is the odd, out-of-kilter and un-PC comments and sexism, which are funny as the female characters are so much richer than their male counterparts, yet all presented in a refreshing way where the audience are trusted to 'make up their own mind' about, rather than the contemporary self-censored PC tosh so prevalent today. The actors seemed to respond with a spirit to match.

The setting for the play is a small and usually quiet pension in Andalucia and sees the main character, Peter (played by Karl Seth) aiming to just read and relax by the pool in order to forget his recent divorce and loss of job. This turns out to be easier said than done, as interruption after interruption by various guests annoy and frustrate poor Peter's desire to be left alone; he isn't interested in their lives or frivolous conversations, though tries to be polite despite his

obvious annoyance. However, events conspire to draw him into the lives of the other guests at the pension, including a kidnapping followed by a visit from the MET's *Detective* Inspector Ron Wilson (menacingly played by Dave Egerton), resulting in a couple of overnight stayers in his room (but I won't spoil it for you). The guests include a mysterious and extremely aloof English lady called Carol (played convincingly by Rebecca Fenwick) who is the ex-girlfriend of an English gangster and 'on the run' – but from what exactly?



Then there is Saskia (Nicole Gaskell) a Dutch backpacker and Mick (Chris Pavlou) a loud Australian who loves to help himself from the bar, whilst Christina (Aligail Hibbert) the waitress is away. Yes the characters are very stereotypical and clichéd but it worked well., and some of the accents were a little dodgy though providing some additional titters. It was only a two-night run so understandably a little rough around the edges. It was funny when Carol ditched her high class toff accent for that of a more down to earth scouser. When Mick suggested that he could ditch his Australian accent and take on the persona of a high class gent, Peter was astounded at such a suggestion and with a sublime English shake of the head indicated that a mere Aussie had no chance of getting away with that – strewth!

For me this was a thoroughly enjoyable play, where it didn't matter that the individual characters didn't have lots of depth or angst or issues, it was a good old fashioned comedy. Some of the puns and jokes were I suppose 'groanable' by some people's standards, but the audience did laugh loads, as I did. I went to be entertained and to have a laugh, which I certainly did. The set itself was basic in layout but as the play all revolved around the pool and bar area of the Spanish pension it was perfectly adequate and no need to clutter the stage with useless props. Perhaps in line with the spirit of the festival, being allowed around school unsupervised was unusual, and in keeping with grown-ups playing out for the evening.

[John Waterhouse](#) 's first foray to the Buxton Fringe was a confident and accomplished effort, and I would now like to see one of his productions in his more familiar territory of Salford Arts Theatre.

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**Editor's Note:** [Are the Arts having a renaissance?](#) Well if you want to discuss this particular topic you should come along to the Manchester Salon on Monday 10 September and join in trying to answer the interminable question of **how we contemplate art today**