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[The Harpington Toad Fanciers' Social](the-harpington-toad-fanciers-social.html "The Harpington Toad Fanciers' Social")

Written by [John Waterhouse](http://www.jcwaterhouse.co.uk/ "John Waterhouse"), Directed by [David Samuels](http://uk.linkedin.com/pub/david-samuels/59/948/18a "Dave Samuels")

Produced by [Nuts & Bolts Theatre](http://www.nabtheatre.com/ "Nuts & Bolts Theatre"), in *Nowt Part of Festival*

Reviewed by [Yvonne Cawley](writers.html#yvonne-cawley "Yvonne Cawley") July 2013

Harpington Toad Fanciers' Social is the wonderfully funny and extremely refreshing comedy by John Waterhouse. The Harpington Toad Fanciers' Society had never had a social before... so did they find more toads or maybe true love? Packed with saucy innuendo, double entendres (without being vulgar) and a witty script, this is a little gem of a play that had the audience, and at times the cast, in stitches. It was advertised as a 16+ play as it has adult humour which is probably about right.

I saw this at *The John Cooper Clarke Theatre*, in the *Black Lion* pub in Salford, which is a great venue. Billed as a comedic mix of *Carry On* and *Last of the Summer Wine* - *Oooh err Missus!* we are introduced to the fantastically quirky characters who make up *The Harpington Toad Fanciers' Society*. Natasha, the newest member of the Society, has caused a bit of a stir, by suggesting that they have a social evening something never before experienced by Norman, Alice and Herbert, the Society's only other 3 members. I mean, how will they cope as this type of thing isn't accounted for in their 360-odd page constitution!

The fun takes place at Norman's house who ticks off that he's laid out some crisps (though not too many now), nuts, a can of pop or two from his little *check list* before his first guest arrives. A real stickler for the rules, and suitably attired in his tank top and cords, Norman is the (self-appointed) Honorary Chair and Founder of the Society and devotee of all Toad and amphibian related activities. He expects all members to do the same and has even devised a little *Toad Mantra* that everyone performs whenever a certain *Holy Grail* of the toad world is mentioned *classic!*

As each guest arrives, we learn a little more about the characters, the workings of the Society and the lengths they go to to keep their love of Toads alive. Natasha (*Keeley Lane*) has a real job on her hands to ensure that they have a fun night, away from *Toad Talk* and as the evening progresses, things begin to *develop* in ways the other three only dreamed of! I won't spoil it for you.

This hour long laugh-fest, *Adapted* and *Directed* by *David Samuels*, flowed effortlessly and relentlessly as we were drawn deeper into *toad territory!* It was a real laugh out loud event, with the audience just totally relaxing and enjoying themselves. This was only achieved by the loveable, likeable and believable characters that came to life on stage and really drew you in. We have *Norman*, who likes things just so and was played wonderfully and convincingly by *Ian Barlow*. He reminded me of Stu Francis,

presenter of Crackerjack, with his ♦Oh I could crush a grape♦ saying! Ian♦s comic timing and delivery were great.

Harpington Toad Fanciers' Society

Abigail Hibbert played Alice beautifully, a wonderful portrayal of a woman waiting to throw off her raincoat, glasses and inhibitions and unleash her true self. A real testament to Abigail♦s acting as I hadn♦ realised until after the show that I had seen her in a previous production of ♦How to Relax in Andaluc♦♦ (another John Waterhouse play) playing a very convincing Spanish waitress. A great performance that delivered a seamless blend of lines, character and attentively nuanced, quirky behaviours.

One of the funniest characters has to be Herbert, brought to life amazingly and surely uniquely by Andrew Marsden. His mannerisms and facial expressions are brilliant as he portrays our third toad aficionado. A bit of a mummy♦s boy, this character is so innocent and endearing, it makes me smile even now. His ability to portray someone so sensitive, attentive and yet detached from his personal dress sense and presence was sublime. However, as he reveals, Herbert has a few surprising moves and other attributes. Fabulously performed.

Last but by no means least, Keeley Lane gives a fantastic performance as Natasha, the Essex party girl trying to bring a bit of fun to the Toad Loving Trio. With lots of HP (Sauce) she portrays a great sexy young woman, full of desires and fun, and wanting to educate the others. She added such a splash of colour to the rule focussed society members, that the dynamic was bound to change. The infectious flirting by Natasha, devilishly goaded by Alice showed a delightful maturity and depth of script, wonderfully drawn out through the production and delivered by actors who really did fly with it - an exhilarating blend.

There was no need for fancy set designs or ♦crash, bang, wallop♦ in yer face effects, just plain and simple props, letting the script and characters speak for themselves. The choice of songs were well thought out fitted in with the production perfectly. The costumes worked brilliantly with just enough quirkiness in there to show the personalities of the characters wearing them. The thing I loved about it was that it was saucy, but not vulgar. All credit to the four actors who gelled so naturally and put on a first class performance ♦to a man♦ and woman of course! And more importantly, they were absolutely enjoying themselves which shone through to the audience.

I defy you to ♦Titter ye Not♦ at this hugely funny and saucy little number, and considering this was an opening night it can't be recommended highly enough.

Click on the leaflet to print your own leaflet with dates for Buxton Fringe Festival, which are:

- Thursday 18th July at 2:00pm & 7:00pm
- Saturday 20th July at 6:30pm & 8:30pm
- Sunday 21st July at 2:00pm & 6:30pm

Promotional video for The Harpington Toad Fanciers' Social