Boy on a Bed at Lowry Studio

Written by Edwin Preece, Directed by Alastair Zyggu, Presented by Organised Chaos Productions

Reviewed by Yvonne Cawley May 2014

Boy on a Bed is the story of an unusual love triangle between characters with very different passions, unusual in the importance given to each of their personal passions, which are on the surface fairly unlikely bed fellows in some ways. **Adam** (*Adam Carroll-Armstrong*) is the central and pivotal character, very much the innocent abroad and naive to the driving force behind his hobby of running every day, sprinting through snow, heat, gales and rain.

Running, Adam gets soaked by a passing bus and **Stella** (*Lily Shepherd*), who is training to be an architect at the same college Adam is studying English Literature, kindly offers him a towel - and they are instantly attracted to each other.

Benedict (*Matthew Hattersley*) is a painter who has an eye for detail and that something special in a subject. As Adam runs by, Benedict sketches him, sparks up fleeting conversations with him and tirelessly tries to persuade him to sit for a painting. Running is a solitary activity and this literary setup allows Adam to be centred in two relationships with a high degree of isolation between the two, or so he thinks as he runs free with his thoughts, seemingly all alone, pounding the streets.

Adam's physical experience of running is a delightful metaphor and backdrop to the lift in pace and expectation he has when being with the attractive, visionary yet practical Stella. With sublime aplomb, Edwin Preece uses the freedom and joy Adam experiences through running to introduce the complication and distraction in the love triangle that is Benedict. Although everything seems settled with Adam arranging to move in with Stella, Benedict gets inside Adam's thoughts rather like the taTu track ' All the things she said '. The outcome is an image that leaves an impression on all of them for the rest of their lives.

Adam runs, come rain or shine, armed with every runner's 3 must have items (though won't spoil it), and Adam Carroll-Armstrong brings this extremely funny, endearing, likeable and very down to earth character completely to life, who is at ease with the compliments, come-ons and abuse he gets during his daily runs.

Benedict is brought to life with credulity and fun by Matthew Hattersley, an artist who loves to regularly sit on a bench in the park and sketch, mainly Adam, as he jogs by flirts relentlessly with Adam admitting he is trying to break him down. The banter between these two is funny and playful. Although you start to wonder about the importance of Adam's sexuality at this point, it isn't something that dominates the play at the expense of a great and interesting story, with unique, individual characters who deliver some classic and very funny 'one-liners'.

Adam is intrigued with the sketches and Benedict says they are nothing compared to what he could do with an actual painting, and invites Adam to pose for him. He discusses this with Stella, not making a big deal of the situation and although she is broadly alright with the situation, she senses something is not quite right and that Adam is behaving out of the ordinary, although not aware that Benedict has been openly flirting with Adam.

Both Benedict and Stella love visual beauty (art and buildings respectively), with Adam the beautiful thing that links them both. The two parallel relationships shift and change with time and with the intervention of an additional character, **Taylor** (*Michael Loftus*), co-owner of the local art gallery where Benedict is to exhibit his new work. This brings out jealousy and uncertainty, and poses the choice for Adam of which road to travel. Taylor plays a rather

self-assured, bossy but quite likeable character who doesn’t suffer fools gladly, with great confidence. This must be frustrating for him no doubt, as it's something of a distraction from the central love triangle.

This was a pure gem of a play and a delightful way to spend an hour. The fast pace, although never rushed or forced, weaves us through the interlinking lives of the characters seamlessly, exploring the development of their relationships, their true-to-self identities and sexuality. We are presented with a whole host of different elements thrown into the mix, cleverly drawing us into wanting more of Adam's developing personality. It was also extremely funny, touching, sad in parts, a story of love both discovered and lost.

All the actors gelled perfectly and each brought something unique to the performance, were totally believable and at ease with their performances. True credit to the production as this was smooth, seamless and flowed perfectly. The set was very well thought out and worked with the interlinking story, each location innovatively divided by subtle floor coverings, making for ease of movement between each scene, particularly where two of the ‘love triangle’ characters are in a scene and then the other in their own location seemingly joins the conversation – I loved this element, bringing all three main characters together. There was imaginative use of the props, made for an interesting set with a great smooth set change by the cast. All credit to the set designer *Jessy Cornips* who is still a student and new to theatre design.

It is when the painting is revealled to Stella that the complexity and richness of her relationship to Adam is drawn out, and Adam's appreciation of the depth that literature offers humanity becomes clear. A play that often lures you in through the phenomenal form of Adam's physical and sexual beauty is explained more deeply through Adam's lyrical constructs and entwining of minds. A most complex menage a troi.

The music was well integrated into the scenes although there was one Jazz song which I found a little loud which made me have to strain to hear a small part of the conversation between Adam and Benedict – could be because I was sat at the back of the theatre, although this was only for a moments and didn't detract from the play.

A great first night performance, and one I would highly recommend – loved it. There is something highly compelling about a story of being passionately into artistic excellence - be it literature, architecture or painting, and appreciating the physicality of such experiences through the running and sexual love metaphors. I understand that the play is to be part of the Buxton Fringe Festival in June so well worth going along to if you can.