



A Taste of Honey

**by Shelagh Delaney
at Oldham Coliseum**

Reviewed by John Waterhouse and John Keane, May 2018

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This is certainly one of the powerful post-war British plays, and as ground-breaking and daring when it first came out in 1958. The play still packs a relevant poignant social statement, raising political questions without becoming bogged down in party doctrines or policies.

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The characters all come over as real and credible, and whilst some issues, such as a man's war wounds and conscription, place the action firmly in the immediate post-war era, these can easily be replaced by more contemporary phenomena such as mental illness or working in a zero-hours, minimum-wage job. The worldview is bleak and there is very little hope, other than trying to find happiness in relationships, avoiding ill-judged actions and lasting consequences.

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Kerrie Taylor is excellent as the alcoholic mother, bringing emotion and gravitas to a woman trapped in a situation she has fallen into. **Gemma Dobson** as her daughter tugs at the heartstrings as she sadly falls into the same lifestyle whilst essentially trying to find solace in a sad situation. **Phil**

Rowson

as Peter presents a well-observed male character from this same bleak work, showing a progressively darker side to the returning war hero and

Max Runham

as Geof gives a sensitive portrayal of a man on the wrong side of social prejudice.

Kenton Thomas

as Jimmie offers some hope but that's probably because he seems untied to the harsh, brutality of depressed, post-industrial society. A strong cast bring over a story which will leave you thinking about what you have witnessed, long after you leave the theatre.

by John Waterhouse

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I have seen *A Taste of Honey* performed several times in different theatres around the country, yet this was definitely one of the more enjoyable versions; an interpretation with more physical interaction between characters than most and all the better for it. The overall tone was grim rather than dark, with the cast striving mightily to eke every titter of desperate humour from the bleak material.

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I loved the set, which cleverly invoked the immediate post-War era in a subtle, understated manner. The Victorian street lamp was a masterful touch, since repressive Victorian values still hung over the late fifties like a funeral pall. Equally evocative was the angular corridor glimpsed beyond the set's only visible doorway, invoking the hopeless blind alley of working class life. One could almost taste the grime and smoke hanging heavy in the air.

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The actors' performances invoked the gloomy, oppressive atmosphere of post-War Britain, with its casual racism, social bigotry and narrow expectations of life and relationships. However, the cast also redefined the play with modern manners and sensibilities, setting it firmly in the twenty-first century. The gay subtext was especially well-handled, reminding us how daring this play must have seemed to fifties audiences when first performed. Indeed, a mildly disabled Geoffrey only accentuated the uncompromising modernity of this inspired interpretation.

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It is astonishing to think that Delaney wrote this play at the tender age of twenty; and even more astonishing that it remains so relevant today in the Age of Austerity. Whether that relates as much to the unchanging nature of Britain as the author's observational genius is one of the work's major debating points.

by John Keane