



[Stay Happy, Keep Smiling](#)

at [53two](#) , Manchester

Reviewed by [Matthew Dougal](#) October 2017

Presented by **Manchester Actors' Platform**, and directed by MAP's founding director **Simon Naylor**,

this is a piece of theatre that will stay with me for a long time.

The play is an amalgam of 5 separate stories seemingly unconnected apart from one simple, but shocking and life-changing thing. They are all eye-witnesses to a brutal murder by an assumed Isis terrorist of a soldier on the street near where they all live. And although the terrorist's actions didn't touch them physically, this play deals with the emotional response and

recoil that witnessing the event has on them. How they are forever changed by it and how they try and cope with the vision and knowledge of it, and how those they love and those they live with try and understand too.

It doesn't sound much fun does it? And with such a title too, one might be forgiven for thinking this should really be a comedy. However, despite the darkness and seriousness of the subject matter, PTSD (something which rarely if ever gets explored), there are plenty of lighter moments in this piece. It is full of humanity and reality, exploring these issues with a gritty realism which we can relate to. In fact, put quite simply it was superbly written, by **Anna Jordan** - definitely a new playwright to keep an eye on!

The play runs approximately 80 minutes through, but the time flies by as you are completely immersed in these snippets of life - I was going to write 'vignettes', but that sounded far too affectatious for this somehow. And with some sensible and sensitive directing by **Simon Naylor** the play feels just about as real as a play can ever be.

Charlie Young plays a wife and mother who after witnessing the attack can no longer hold her two young children and watches them from afar. Her scene with her young son Aaron (played superbly by 8 year old **Rueben Clarke**), and her revelations at the therapist were spine-chillingly observed. Another very strong performance came from

Jake Ferretti

playing Stefan. His coping mechanism seems to have unchanged him on the surface but dig deeper and it is there, it just needed a little provocation, provided ably by news reporter Lena (**Lucy Ross-Elliott**).

Other strong performances, what am I writing - they were all strong performances - came from **Simon Hallman**

as Elliot; a man who burned his hand and struggles to tell anyone about his sexuality;

Dave Howell

as Tony, an English teacher who is signed off due to stress;

Alexandra Maxwell

as Annie, who seems to have lost everything including the ability to really feel, except the will to stare at the spot where the soldier died late at night; and

Parisa Nikkah-Eshghi

as a presumably Persian Muslim lady who, after witnessing this attack, has memories flooding back of how her and her mother escaped and witnessed soldiers kill her younger brother and father.

The multi-tiered composite set worked well, and this tight and effective new writing (receiving its professional premiere) together with a talented and strong ensemble cast make this a most compelling and thought-provoking piece of entertainment - yes, it was, despite everything entertaining too - and it fully deserved not just mine but the whole audience's hearty applause last night. If this site gave star ratings then I would grant this production an unhesitating 5!