Up the Bunting

Theatre Pop @ Bar Pop, Manchester

Reviewed by Matthew Dougall September 2017

At a time when the Fringe scene in Manchester is surprisingly quiet, as the summer's madness fades and the Autumn seasons haven't really kicked in yet, Wildcat and Lipstick Thespians chose to capitalise on this by presenting their latest collaboration.

They also chose a little known and highly underused venue too. The basement theatre at Bar Pop on Canal Street. More widely known as a night-club and cabaret venue, it has very limited lighting capacity, but being centrally located and easy to find, it does make for a sensible choice when looking for Fringe venues.

However, back to the play, and this was a one act 45 minute comedy, written by and starring **St ephen Donald**
. The basic premise for the play being a nerdish forty-something man with a mother-complex, dressed in cagoule and woolly hat visits the local fete; an event he does each year and always with his mother, since this is something they both love. This year however, he appears to have come alone... that is until he brings out a tea caddy from his bag, so that he can show this year's fete to his mother who is both physically in the caddy and spiritually in heaven.

There is also something else different this year too. The traditional games and stalls have been replaced with more upmarket, middle-class tents, one of which offers something called Reiki. He inadvertently wanders passed this tent and is immediately grabbed by the tent's occupant; a rather overpowering, dotty and gobby, latter-day hippy who swiftly manoeuvres her 'victim' to the massage table, and whilst practising her 'like massage but without touching' skills proceeds to tell him her life story.

Interruptions of hallucinatory visions of his mother notwithstanding, it seems that these two lost souls have something very much in common. And since this piece has been produced to garner feedback and reaction for possible future development, then I think it would be nice to explore their similarities too, as well as their differences, and perhaps see them get together or go out on a date.

However, what was presented was intelligently directed by **Alexis Tuttle**, and played with fun and vigour and for all that its worth by the somewhat larger-than-life interpretations of
Stephen Donald
as Colin and
Hayley Cartwright
as Lisa. Cartwright's powerful but never OTT performance and comedic skill balanced nicely against Donald's more introvert awkwardness. His more serious monologues about his mother were excellently judged.

It proved to be an entertaining hour's diversion, and yes, there is definitely scope for development with this piece. The play ran for two nights only and so this version has now finished; however, I hope Colin and Lisa will be brought out again in the future.