



[The Newspaper Boy](#) at 53two

by Chris Hoyle

Reviewed by [Jane Tuttle](#) February 2018

Dibby Theatre Production's ***The Newspaper Boy*** is a triumphant piece of comedy writing by proud Mancunian **Chris Hoyle**. Directed by **Simon Naylor**

, this tightly written, coming-of-age story, set in 90s Manchester bobs along at a pace akin to a good night-out at the Hacienda from days gone by.

It's 1992 and Christian Dibmore (**Daniel Maley**) is a 15 year-old, Moston born, working class child star in the nation's favourite soap; Mancroft Walk. On-screen, Christian plays a cheeky local paperboy. Off-screen, he lives with his single parent mum, Sharon (

Samantha Siddall

), and Nana Jean (

Karen Henthorn

).

We follow Christian on his naive journey as he becomes friends with his on-screen girlfriend, Mandy (**Holly-Jay Bowes**), who has starred in Mancroft Walk since she was 10 days old. Under the influence of the nation's favourite little girl, the now teenage Mandy introduces Christian to designer clothes, the gay scene, drugs and her gay foster brother Max (

Sam Retford

).

As you would expect, Christian is eventually busted for his drug-taking and under-age partying - hardly surprising when his every move is monitored by both press and neighbours! It is within the confines of burgeoning sexuality, that this teenager finds himself confronting the consequences of being gay alongside the legalities of a then age of consent set at 21, for same sex relationships.

Thirty seconds into the show, you will find yourself laughing out loud at this inspired and observant piece of theatre. Karen Henthorn opens the show and is in a class of her own as Nana Jean; taking the art of acting with props to a whole new level. Hollie-Jay Bowes as the on-screen Rosie Chadwick and off-screen Mandy, plays adolescent prima donna to perfection. Daniel Malay as Christian, looks a credible teenager opposite Sam Retford's Max, purveyor of drugs and gay love interest. Eve Steele as Dee the Dealer is joyfully convincing as we meet her selling her wares in the club loo!

The carefully constructed set has to inhabit the Dibmore living room, complete with Christian's upstairs bedroom; a TV studio set; a nightclub; Mandy's and Max's bedrooms; a nightclub loo; a TV make-up department and the executive office of Mancroft Walk. Performed at 53two, this set sits snugly and expertly in the main fringe venue. Alongside traditional stage sets, we are treated to large and small screens that reflect whatever is being shown on the Dibmore's living room TV. Be it Christian acting on Mancroft Walk through to the authentic 90s adverts in the commercial break.

Who remembers the Wrigley's gum ad on a coach trip where the boy breaks his gum in half and hands it to the girl? Or, the Milky Way ads? Sublime multi-media usage by Simon Naylor in weaving these 90s classics so expertly into both the set and as a distraction during scene changes. Chris Hoyle's play is fresh and exciting in a way that is reminiscent of other notable Northern playwrights such as Willy Russell and Jim Cartwright. Tackling stories with northern grit that pricks social conscience and is wrapped-up in truly enviable northern humour.

Aimed at audiences aged over 16, this is a highly authentic, funny and poignant story. In typical fringe venue style, what it lacks in plush seating with guaranteed sight lines, it makes-up for with a very welcoming well-stocked bar, comfy pre-show seating, an art gallery, piano, drum-kit and a fantastic after-show atmosphere.

On until 24th Feb, this is a guaranteed winner of a show that will have you both laughing and crying - but mostly laughing. UNMISSABLE!