



**[Vincent River](#) by Philip Ridley**

at Hope Mill Theatre

Reviewed by [Katie Leicester](#) February 2018

*Vincent River* by Philip Ridley premiered in London at the Hampstead Theatre in 2000; the script has been cleverly adapted to accommodate the town of Manchester where Hope Mill

Theatre hosted this compelling and gripping play directed by

**John Young.**

Hope Mill is notorious for its versatility and creativity in set design and the use of their fabulous theatre space, and they did not fail to deliver again for this performance. On a freezing evening guests were given blankets and lead into the auditorium where you walked through the set to the seating area giving you an authentic feel of entering an apartment through its front door.

Designer **Alice Smith** created a stunning set for the two actors to work with consisting of a dining table and two chairs, a 1980's style kitchen, stained carpets, drab wallpaper, half-opened boxes and finished off with *Windolene* on the windows all adding to the ambiance of the evening that was about to unfold.

From the outset, the audience is thrown into the drama, as if watching a story that is already half played out, as Davey (**Dominic Holmes**) arrives on the doorstep of Anita's (**Joyce Branagh**) dingy flat in Wythenshawe. She is battered and bruised, and he confesses to her that he cannot escape her dead sons' ghost after finding Vincent's body in a disused toilet in Withington Gate Station - a well-known place for men to meet men for sex.

On the surface, it initially seems like the story is of a homophobic murder, but when the gin starts flowing and Anita and Davey start to tell a few home truths about themselves, it becomes obvious from Davey's demeanour that that's not the total picture. Anita tries to come to terms with her loss and the hidden fact of her sons' sexuality (an aspect of his identity that she had

refused to countenance while he was alive), and in the aftermath of his murder with unkind neighbours and gossip, she is forced to flee her home in Hulme. Anita begins her story with the illegitimate conception of her child, when as a young seamstress she had an affair with a married man, and the shame and hardship that followed the pregnancy and birth of Vincent.

The story pieces together after the death of Davey's mother when he is finally able to be honest about his sexuality, and to explain to Anita the link he really had with Vincent. Davey, a promiscuous gay male from the age of 14 with overbearing homophobic parents meets Vincent by chance as their mothers are in hospital, his mum dying of cancer and Anita having a unsightly vein removed from her foot. Davey is captivated by Vincent but unable to perform sexually in the safe haven of a bedroom, enticing him into his risky environments of unused and deserted places. On the promise of excitement and sex Vincent is lured to the place he finally meets his death by a gang of 5 homophobic drunken men watched from a distance by Davey.

Loss features significantly in this tense, gritty and poignant short drama, and you witness some very intense scenes throughout the evening making some parts a very awkward watch, especially when Davey tries to become intimate with Anita in a moment of passion and the primal scream of a horrified mother at the end.

A very impressive and moving performance by Joyce Branagh with her convincing and accurate portrayal of a bereaved mother following a murder, but equally an outstanding delivery by Dominic Holmes as his role as Davey. Overall, everyone involved in this production should feel incredibly proud of their hard work on this moving and gripping piece of theatre, and I would highly recommend spending a worthwhile evening watching this show which runs until Saturday 24th March 2018.