



[You Are Being Watched](#)  
at The Static Gallery, Liverpool

Reviewed by [Denis Joe](#) March 2012

The thought of sitting through a skit on James Bond, didn't exactly fill me with joy. This production, created by [Young Everyman Playhouse](#), drew on the Austin Powers films (I'm not a fan of Mr Myers), so when I saw James Bond and Money Penny exchanging dialogue on the very basic stage, I was immediately hit by two things. Firstly the cast looked every bit the parts of a Bond film (though no actual cast list, just a list of names in the programme), and the actor playing Bond oozed suaveness and the banter between Bond and Money Penny was excellent and extremely funny. Secondly, the humour was typically historical British: full of double entendres and sight gags.

The characters were would expect from a James Bond spoof: handsome and self-deprecating. The storyline was straight forward *goodies vs. baddies*, with the goodies portrayed as cool, sophisticated and lovable and the baddies portrayed as nasty and slightly insane. But

***You Are Being Watched***

was so much more than a send up for our entertainment. The straight forward 'goodies vs. baddies' scenario may well have reflected the debased role of what passes for political reasoning these days, but the fact that the baddies were out to create a world in which everyone was subjected to surveillance seem to distort our understanding of who are the good guys and who are the bad.

The character of the evil sidekick of the evil Dr Corneto, Glock (as sort of 'Igor' character: ugly and physically deformed) was an interesting development. His part only requires him to make monosyllabic responses. On one level this is very funny, but it is the scene where Corneto and Madam Drovah are having an hysterical laughter contest and talking about their plans bring everyone under their control, when Glock keeps asking "Why?", that you realise what an outstanding and subtle piece of agitprop *You Are Being Watched* actually is. The baddies never answer Glock, they only tell him to "Shut up!".

Also what was clever about this play was that, although the actors picked on the audience (including me) there was never any of the cruelty that passes for much of the 'edgy' comedy of today, involved. In his 'Essay on the Meaning of Comic' the French philosopher, Henri Bergson had this to say about comic character:

**"Comedy depicts characters we have already come across and shall meet with again... It aims at placing types before our eyes. It even creates new types, if necessary."**

It is this that the YEP have managed to do. The baddies are not a threat that we recognise; they are not out to destroy the world or wipe out populations. Their intent is to bring populations under their watch. And is this not what real government has already done? Much as we may not like politicians we accept that they have our interests at heart, and it is through the prism of 'good intention' that Britain has become the country with the largest population under surveillance. One of the most terrifying ideas of my generation was to live under a society like that of East Germany, where every member of the population was either spying or being spied on by the state. Yet today many of us, if not quite accepting of CCTV surveillance of our every public move, have resigned ourselves to it. Something that was once associated with 'the baddies' is widely promoted as something needed to protect us from some ambiguous 'other'. And it is the ambiguity that makes Glock's questioning both funny and disturbing.

That we have become so inured to having others know so much about us, means that we think nothing about handing over our names, addresses and any biographical details that some organisation or other feel is needed in order to provide us with a better service. When we wish to buy tickets for any event we are, invariably, required to give over our contact details. The YEP put this to an excellent use by calling out the names of audience members and recruiting them to follow and photograph members of the cast who were in the role of spies. What was sheer genius about this was that the theatre was then taken to the streets of Liverpool. Once those selected were taken away, along with the spies, the rest of the audience were then asked to leave the Static Gallery and make their way to Liverpool One.

Once we reached our destination the cast were already there and the 'baddies' began calling out to people who were passing, telling them they were being watched and describing them in detail so that they knew who they were.



Again, there was no attempt to belittle anyone and the gentleness of the comedy acted to make this piece quite an unsettling performance. It was something that we were aware of and seemed comfortable with, but the repetition of the statement 'You Are Being Watched' and the slight discomfort that we all feel when we are 'picked on' in situations like this. Actually, this was a powerful challenge to our acceptance or indifference to the fact that national and local government think nothing about invading our public and private space.

If this is the quality of the work we get from 'grassroots' organisations such as the Young Everyman Playhouse, then the future of theatre seems assured. What was obvious from this production was that it was not only the cast that contributed to the success of 'You Are Being Watched', but also the technicians helped to create some excellent and well-timed comedy.

Some of the members of ***Young Everyman Playhouse*** have joined the group as part of work experience schemes. Such schemes have met with a lot of bad press recently, and while some of the strands provide some degree of 'on the job training', overall the

**YEP**

is far more wide reaching than that, and its main aim is to facilitate the development of young people across a number of areas within theatre. Whilst society may not seem to provide an optimistic outlook for many young people starting out on life, the

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can help towards youngsters developing their own vision.

What was obvious to me from this production was that its success was not down to the amount of money spent on it, but was certainly down to the enthusiasm and creativity of all those who were involved. Everything was made to look so easy and this certainly provided thought-provoking and entertaining theatre. The Young Everyman Playhouse season continues with 'Excuse Me' (24/25 March, outside of the Museum of Liverpool on the Albert Docks) and Illyria (17 – 21 April at the Playhouse Studio). For more information, click on this [Young Everyman Playhouse](#) link.