



You're Not Alone by Kim Noble
at Contact Theatre , Manchester
Reviewed by Stephen Bowler March 2016

Kim Noble begins his one-man gig pacing twitchily, e-cig in one hand, drink in the other, sizing-up the punters as we the audience file into the theatre. No wonder he looks on-edge: in the hour that follows he dredges the depths of discomfort as he bulldozes the boundaries of bad taste.

With the aid of a rolling series of images and video Noble narrates quirky stories about relationships, identity, employment, desire, death, taxidermy and more. He lures hapless saps into kinky encounters on and off-line. He gets audience members involved. He plays games with neighbours, family and strangers. He does strange things with dead animals and inanimate objects. He dresses as a woman, distresses his manhood and fornicates with fruit. At one point he defecates on a church floor.

The performance left me reeling; stunned at a procession of stunts that tended to the cruel and manipulative more than the merely absurd or irreverent. If there is a theme it is self-loathing, in particular the all-too conventional loathing of regular modern heterosexual males. Women get off lightly. But at the same time, thematic clarity is negated in the search for ever more shocking scenes.

His show was a sell-out. Many – though not all – loved it. Noble worked hard to discomfort the audience by being continually in amongst us, revealing far too much of himself and keeping everyone on edge, uncovering nuggets of nonsense from private lives – his own most of all – and drilling down into them to reveal the fantastic absurdity of modern self-hood. The more sordid and self-deprecating, the more authentic, is the direction of travel here.

Where might such a journey end? It seems to me that the logic of Noble's performance is death. No rebound is on offer; no way back to life. Theatre of Cruelty doesn't do catharsis, because it doesn't do mind. Sensory overload is the chosen medium, overriding anything so hackneyed as intellect. Compassion is flagged in the final phase of the performance, where we see Noble's father in what seems like an 'end of life' situation, but why this should register any more meaningfully than the rest is unclear. Compassion, by this stage, is just another trope on the moral bonfire.

Nihilism is nothing new. It is, though, ghoulishly mainstream today, as the reflex of a fearful subjectivity so decadent it fantasises its own end. With luck, Kim Noble will find a more life

affirming outlet for his prodigious talent and energy. Until then his scabrous schtick is an all-too depressing reminder that misanthropy is near-to-hand and often in receipt of Arts Council funding.