



Grumpy Old Women

at Lowry

Reviewed by Jane Turner, April 2018

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Starring Jenny Eclair, Dilly Keane and Lizzie Roper

Between 2010 and 2050, the global population of over-65s is expected to treble from 530 million to 1.5 billion, and within the next 10 years, for the first time ever, over-65s will outnumber under-fives. The population is about to get a lot older, and if caricatures of old people are to be believed, and this play is full of them, the world is about to get a hell of a lot grumpier.

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Recent newspaper headlines such as "Are Grandma and Grandpa bad for the environment?" and "Are selfish baby boomers making life difficult for younger generations by hanging on to wealth, jobs and property?" is enough to make anyone over the age of 50 grumpy. If there is one thing that makes *me* turn into a grumpy old woman, it's this inter-generational sparring that lets politicians off the hook.

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But rather than getting grumpy about being blamed for such serious problems, the grumpy old women in this play, moan about the menopause, housework, manspreading, mindfulness, cellulite, old-age sex, men, and a whole host of other niggles and nasties that many of us experience as we age. They did get a dig in about the fact that some women have had their state pension age increased (to loud applause from the audience) which they likened to "being mugged once a week for a decade", and they slagged off Donald Trump more than once. But mostly it was just a moanfest with lots of laughs about the foibles of ageing.

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Lizzie Roper bounced on stage as "HRT woman", Jenny Clair puffed and panted as "menopausal woman" whipping her cardigan on and off and regularly wringing out her clothing. Dilly Keane creaked on as "hatchet face woman" and spent most of the evening trying and failing to get up out of a chair. All three did a great job of sending up their grumpy old selves. I laughed a lot, more than I expected to, mostly because I recognised many of their frustrations, being on the "wrong" side of 50 myself. Taking an age to scroll down to one's date of birth online and missing the walnuts off the whips being two personal bugbears I could easily get into a strop about. Their sketch about the wardrobe essentials of middle aged women was hilarious and reminded me to ditch any stripy tops and never to buy a gilet.

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But I do think this type of gender stereotyping comedy has limited appeal because surely the

world where women-do-this and men-do-that has changed? As Theresa May found out to probable regret when she said on national TV that around the house, there were "boy jobs and girl jobs" result; furore by zealous women yelling "sexism". However, if the statistics are right and the population is getting older, Eclair and co should still get appreciative audiences of "real women who still make gravy out of giblets" who can laugh at themselves for some time to come.

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While gender stereotypes are often used to get a few laughs (or as in the PM's case, hysterical assertions), these days you must be careful about causing offence, as some grumpy women - usually of the younger species - just can't take this kind of skit anymore. Luckily for this aged cast, the mostly female audience looked like being from the same generation so probably had thicker - as well as older - skin, and the ability to withstand and appreciate such banter for what it is. A younger female audience would probably haul the cast up in front of judge and jury for offences against their sensitivities, especially for the jokes about teenagers who apparently are "unable to tie their own shoelaces unless they have watched a video on YouTube".

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But, even though I often laugh at my ageing self, dislike taking out the bins and was entertained by some of the incisive wisecracks and energetic horseplay, I was a bit disappointed that these three very grumpy and characterful women mostly talked about domestic (who throws the toilet roll tube out) and bodily (menopausal) issues. Apart from a quick mention of the state pension age, they left out all the hard stuff such as housing, the environment, and the national debt, all of which have been blamed on the grumpy generation that these three clever comedians represent. This grumpy woman would have used the opportunity to strike back at whingeing millennials and demonstrate why women of a certain age have just as much, if not more to say and offer as younger women.

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But I really must compliment these three magnificent examples of older women, Eclair, Keane

and Roper, still on the road instead of the sofa and with masses of get-up-and-go. They are talented and individual women who energetically demonstrated their desire to grow old disgracefully and have some fun. The audience cheered them on in this endeavour, as we all should instead of begrudging our elders what they have worked so hard for. As they said, just because they need to sit down to put their tights on, doesn't mean they do not have the skills or the brains for anything else. Respect.