
TaPestries 2018

Waterside Theatre, Sheena Simon College

Reviewed by [Matthew Dougall](#) January 2018

This is Arden Theatre School's annual showcase for students on the BA in Theatre and Performance Course - Hence the TaP of the title. This year's show however was something a little bit different and perhaps a little special too.

The Arden students never fail to excite and challenge, and today experience was absolutely no exception. This course's trademark experimental un-acted style of presentation was put to the test in the hardest of ways, by making them perform their own interpretations and reworkings of two very famous and classic plays.

First up was Jim Cartwright's To (or Two as I now believe the revised spelling of the title to be). This however was Two By Ten. A treatment of Two but performed by ten.

The ten cast members mingled with the audience prior to the start of the show, introducing themselves and telling us snippets of information about them, or perhaps their characters, it was unclear, deliberately so. Their white T-shirts all brandishing the same slogan as if to challenge and provoke... "This is a T-shirt".

Don't worry, you didn't need to know the play from which this was based in order to understand and enjoy. It was very simply laid out for us with excellent use of comedy. It did at times feel very much like a drama school show (which of course it was), but some of the 'games' they played were nothing more than exercises and games that are played in classes. For example; standing still and not moving, holding that pose for as long as possible before the pose simply has to be broken.

In this afternoon's show the audience was made up by majority fellow students, with a couple of tutors and family members, and so judging the audience reactions was not a good measure of success. The students all loved it, whooping and laughing at every opportunity. However, this was a play that required a lot of audience interaction and participation. I am not so certain it would have worked as well as it did if the cast had had an audience of total strangers to work with.

However, that being said I did enjoy the play, and despite it's rather unique and indefinable performance style found it engaging and comedic. A rather surprisingly sombre and sobering end with apt but perhaps unnecessary Shakespeare and Peter Brook references brought this hour long play to a close.

Directed by **Graham Hicks**, the balances between real and surreal, comedy and naturalism were excellently thought through, and the way in which the cast asked for audience help was pleasant and well-meaning. I have seen shows of this nature in the past where the asking for

volunteers becomes very demanding and off-hand, and if someone is shy or uncertain they are more or less bullied into complying. Thankfully this was not the case here I am very happy to report. So congratulations to the ensemble of the ten young students

Keisha Anderson

,

Michael Burton

,

Gemma Childs

,

Chloe Grantham-Evans

,

Cyril Katso

,

Ryan Lea

,

Leanne Mole

,

Marcus Richardson

,

Sam Robson

and

Katie Wardle

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After a short interval we returned to the auditorium to see a bastardised version of - or at the very least, a completely new interpretation of - The Glass Menagerie by Tennessee Williams. This time called Remembering Blue Roses and directed by Theatre and Performance Head tutor, **Wayne Steven Jackson**. The mood has now changed, and the stage black and funereal. Sombre music is playing and smoke fills the dimmed spotlight shining on a single blue rose. A girl stands staring at the rose, as if in mourning, or perhaps remembrance.

This is a highly stylised presentation and the overall mood is dark and broody. The happier and younger times of our two protagonists played out in sombre and morose fashion with no-one ever walking faster than a funeral march. The protagonists, Laura and Tom are played by more

than one person in their memory sequences, but this is quite easy to follow as the costumes are the give-away here.

It isn't the characters which pull my focus in this presentation, but the music, effects and lighting which take my attention. Pools of light flash on and off as characters appear and speak in different parts of the blank stage; other actors shine lights or drop blue petals in a lightning flash; and the whole play is underscored (too loudly) with unearthly mood music.

This again is highly experimental in nature, but I feel this time that the experiment has taken control and somehow lost sight of the story and the goal posts. I enjoyed the memories speech at the end, and as this wrapped up the idea of the play quite neatly, the mirror image of the start of the play was shown once again before the blackout.

It was an interesting piece, but quite samey and didn't really sustain my interest unfortunately. I found myself wandering at times and had to bring myself back to the stage. But it was acted with passion by **Jessamine Vowles, Lauren O'Hara, Kayleigh Rough, Stacie Tisley, Isabella**

Curtis

Georgia Dodd

Amber Jarvis

Kellie Colbert

Daniel Sanders

Noah Ross

and

Rory Kelly

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One more thing I should like to say before I conclude this review, and this concerns both casts, and this is audibility and vocal projection. The Waterside Theatre is a studio theatre space and not at all vocally challenging. However, for the vast majority of this afternoon I was straining to hear what was being said. No-one was projecting their voices, but instead speaking quietly in naturalistic monotones. Once the cast spoke through a microphone then all was clear, but, and this was especially true of the second piece; the vast majority of spoken dialogue not mic'd was far too quiet and therefore lost on me. Shame.