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Verbatim recordings take us back into the time of rioting

Hooded raiders and do-gooders emotively brought to life

LITTLE REVOLUTION
Almeida, N1
★★★★☆

The shooting of Tottenham's Mark Duggan proved the final straw for many young people in 2011, as the city descended into the London riots. Lost amidst the smoke and sirens, however, was the unrest that had been brewing up to this point, as the Almeida's latest world premiere astutely and emotively investigates.

Little Revolution is based upon the recordings picked up by Alecky Blythe when she travelled the streets of Hackney with a Dictaphone during and following the riots.

Interviewing and observing many of its key figures – from beer-looting high-rise kids to bohemian do-gooders – the playwright subsequently arranged her recordings into a short “verbatim” play, brought to life by actors re-voicing the conversations through earpieces on stage.

While loosely focusing on the community's efforts to help devastated shopkeeper Siva (empathetically played by Rez Kempton) rebuild his ransacked convenience store, the play mostly uses recurring vignettes to create a collage of London's rich multiculturalism – asking us how much divides like race and class matter and what can be done to help those who are overlooked or prejudiced against.

Campaign

Suggestions come from every corner: Pembury Estate parents campaign hard against the police's unfair persecution of their children, while a motley crew led by councillor Ian Rathbone (a lively Barry McCarthy) opts to bring the community together through a Marks & Spencer's-sponsored street party.

Set as it is in an Upper Street theatre, much fun is had at the expense of the



■ Rez Kempton and the Community Chorus

Picture: Manuel Harlan

middle classes. Blythe admirably looks in the mirror for this: unusually starring as herself, she tiptoes recorder-in-tow around the sparsely-scaffolded set, introducing herself to hooded rioters as a lady who “writes plays” – a brave move indeed.

There are plenty of stand-out cameos – many of which come from volunteers of the local community, who perform alongside hired actors. Considering its verbatim basis, the dialogue is surprisingly sharp; after watching horse-

mounted policeman storm past beneath booming helicopter surround sound, one tracksuited teenage girl reasonably says: “I don't see the point of the horses. What are they going to do?”

Does it actually raise any new questions about the riots? Perhaps not, but as a colourful celebration of inner-city diversity, *Little Revolution* makes for an enjoyable evening with characters as large as life itself.

Until October 4.

Alex Bellotti



■ Andrew Maddock

Picture: Hannah Ellis Photography

Tales of isolation in an age of connectivity pack a punch

THE ME PLAYS
Old Red Lion, N1
★★★★☆

It is a complaint commonly heard these days that we live in a world ever more detached from reality, but what effect does this have on us?

The first in a two play monologue, written and performed by Andrew Maddock, sheds some light on the impact on the modern man. His character is hovering around 30 and single. He is a self-confessed porn addict and a keen user of Tinder, but eager to make that connection with a special someone.

The stage is etched with lines spread across the floor that appear to be without form, but as time passes it becomes increasingly noticeable that these represent different types of boxes and different types of prisons.

For all the promised freedoms of the digital age, there is the reductive force of human impulse and desire, perennial fears and

timeless woes. In a world devoured by the sensation FOMO (match, “fear of missing out”) with boundless porn only a finger click away, how do we suffer? In a taut hours' worth of theatre, this is an amble through the murky world of disconnect in the age of connectivity.

The second play is anchored with the topic of mortality. Our narrator is shackled to a hospital bed terminally ill. He will delve into the past and for every moment that he does so, he steps forward away from the hospital sheets, a smile creeping upon his face as the warmth of nostalgia provides momentary respite. When the moment passes, he slinks back to the bed. This second play is not without its missteps. Slightly baggy and indulgent in parts, it nevertheless evokes a potent punch come the conclusion.

All in all, these are compelling plays. Until 20th September 2014.

Greg Wetherall

Colliding worlds of innocent schoolboy and trapped prostitute are a powerful experience

CHICKEN SHOP
Park Theatre, N4
★★★★☆

In 2009, Anna Jordan read an article about a raid on a secret brothel located over her local chicken shop in Hounslow. The dawning realisation of horror close to home forms the spine of her provocative 2011 piece, debuting at Park Theatre.

Through smart lighting cues and sliding transitions, Jemma Gross's staging links the two worlds: the domestic realm of mopp-haired 16-year-old Hendrix (Jesse Rutherford), grappling with school bullies and parental drama, and the stifling prison of forced prostitute Luminita (Lucy Roslyn). Desperate to prove his manhood, Hendrix pays poignantly awkward Luminita for “the girlfriend experi-

ence”, but his coming of age takes a traumatic course when he comprehends the extent of her suffering.

The hero rushing to the aid of the hooker with a heart of gold is a perilously clichéd set-up, but perceptive writing and understated performances ground the action in the disturbingly familiar.

Jordan focuses on minutiae, with great support from Florence Hazard's design, offering revolting rather than romanticised squalor. When Hendrix opens the window – forbidden by Luminita's odious pimp (John Last) – joy, release, grief and yearning cross Roslyn's face in a heartstopping moment.

Conversely, the overlong home scenes stall. Hendrix's forthright, cause-loving mother (Angela Bull) and her sexpot lover (Millie Reeves) remain types, the latter

grating until she lets her mask slip to reveal venom beneath. Stronger are the issues touched upon, including the increased sexualisation of our culture and challenges a lesbian mother faces in raising a son.

Rutherford, excellent throughout, captures the frustrated inexperience of someone on the cusp of adulthood, though both his total naivety and lack of contemporary tropes like social media date the play.

Still, Jordan adeptly contrasts the difficulties of someone with boundless choices and those of one whose world has shrunk to mere survival. We know that difference intellectually, but seeing it first-hand in searing drama is a powerful experience.

Until September 28.

Marianka Swain



■ Great performance by Jesse Rutherford as the innocent with John Last as the odious pimp

Picture: Kim Hardy Photography