

The Critics: **Theatre**

Worthy but thin tale of broken Britain

CHANGING STATE
HEN & CHICKENS THEATRE

★★★★☆

Eighteen months on, and Ed Miliband is still intoning "Cost of living crisis" in the hope of persuading disillusioned voters that someone at Westminster understands their plight. Yet the gulf between rhetoric and experience seems ever widening, making art that gives voice to the unheard vital at this key political moment.

Unfortunately, writer/director Tian Glasgow can't decide what that voice should be. Surface-level school assembly docudrama *Changing State* is a plodding retreat of established (if underexplored) issues rather than metaphorical interpretation casting them in a new light. It's unarguably worthy, but never truly engages.

Glasgow's piece is peppered with troubling statistics about low-income and ethnic-minority households that, together, demonstrate a vicious, inescapable cycle. His characters aren't so much people as schematic embodiments of those statistics: Steve (Michael Robinson), the student-turned-drug dealer who dies young; Sarah (Kirsten Moore), falling into the trap of teen pregnancy; Emma (Belinda Fenty), selling out to a phony talent show; and Tyrone (Ashden B. Oke), futilely battling the local council.

The latter thread is

most informative, offering an exhaustive demonstration of punishing bureaucracy. Unfit housing means Tyrone's sister is sick and missing school, but it's not until he's caught up in the riots that he's able to game the system – coming of age here synonymous with cynicism. But resonant ideas like "parentless" youth and Millennials' mistrust of the future are squandered in cod

psychology, stilted dialogue and blunt statements.

The only bright spots are a couple of promising lyrical monologues and spirited turns from Moore and Oke. "The audience wants to know you," counsels Emma's manager, and though we understand the challenges faced by those feeling doubly disenfranchised – by background and by youth – Glasgow's audience never really gets to know them. Until February 14.

Marianka Swain

Picture:
Camilla Greenwell



■ The cast of *Marching on Together*

Brutal yet honest soccer tale

MARCHING ON TOGETHER
OLD RED LION THEATRE

★★★★☆

Marching on Together is a play by Adam Hughes that takes us straight back to the height of the football season in 1984. The setting is Leeds, and it's carnage. West Yorkshire miners are on strike and football hooliganism is rife, with bitter battles being fought on both the picket line and the touchline.

Macca, ex-leader of the notorious Service Crew, is released from prison into a Leeds he no longer recognises. With his crew disbanded and settled down with their wife and kids, a younger generation have taken up his violent mantle defending the mighty Whites. Meanwhile, his wife and son seem to have moved on in their lives, and with political issues and miners on strike, there is very little work about. Now, more than ever, Macca needs the firm to give him a sense of purpose. This is no longer just about fighting for Leeds, now he is fighting for

survival.

It's a brutal yet honest play that takes us inside the fascinating world of football hooliganism. The name of the game here is winning the fight, not the football score.

Joshua McTaggart's direction is frenetic and charged, and there are lively and fast-paced performances from the actors throughout. Adam Patrick Boakes is sympathetic as loyal Macca, who faces his demons in taking on a father figure role to young, impressionable miner Tommy (Joshua Garwood). Alex Southern is fantastic as Nathan, the bullying and preening new leader of the hooligans.

Meanwhile the sparse set of corrugated iron and the '80s songs which accompany each set change bring the gritty play to life.

Football has changed a lot since the days of *Marching on Together* and this play is a reminder of a not so distant part of our past that many would rather forget.

Emily Govan

Kenya's complex battle with war and peace

To coincide with Valentine's Day, peace-building charity International Alert is running a photo exhibition and pop-up flower shop at the Hoxton Gallery until Sunday, with the aim of examining the relationship between water, conflict and peace in Kenya.

"Peace blooms: Cattle, conflict and the roses of Lake Naivasha" brings to life the stories of rose farmers and traditional Maasai pastoralists living around Lake Naivasha, a vital freshwater source in the dry Rift Valley of Kenya.

Against the backdrop of poverty, poor governance, ethnic tensions and the rise of Al Shabaab militancy, the exhibition explores how competition over water has created potential for conflict in



the country. Yet it also shows how the sustainable and fair management of water and other natural resources can support peace and stability.

■ The exhibition is free and runs at the Hoxton Gallery, 9 Kingsland Road, London E2 8AA. For more information, visit hoxtongallery.com.

