

An Actor Despairs Review

The production started with actors coming into the audience introducing the production as a screening for a sitcom. A confusing proposal, one I hoped would make more sense as the production went on. I also noticed something when this carried out, the cast gathered to talk to their friends in the audience. This was slightly disappointing to see this exclusion taking place and feeling something that no audience wants to feel; isolation. In the future, I would push the cast to talk to everyone in an audience or none.

Max Dobson is a very talented writer and that is not a controversial thought, everyone in the audience could obviously see that. The characters were fully developed, plot points were good, and dialogue is beautifully done at times. For example, I adored the friendship between Tom (played by Cameron Wright) and Jack (played by Ethan Chappell-Mason). It flowed and seemed so real, especially with the awkward blossoming romance between Jack and Max (Anna Robinson). However, I would encourage Dobson to develop his inclusion of comedy in his work. For examples, at times innuendos felt added for the sake of innuendos, not for comedic affect. This with the strange additions, like all the cast signing "did someone say just eats?", just felt unnecessary.

Speaking of comedy, Jan (Isha Kahira) and Mathew (Adam Boshier) grew on me. They felt like weird additions at the beginning but as they became exposition for the other character and started adding to the plot, they were brilliant. Isha is so funny, her sharp sass and dismissive wit was amazing. Adam is such a dramatic guy, I adored them together. In fact, I wanted more of them and that is such a brilliant sign.

As a viewer, I felt that the crew's research question "What happens when you mix what is naturalist with what is abstract?" doesn't apply to this performance. Perhaps it is me not being able to see the broader picture, but I couldn't see anything abstract in the situations they were proposing. For example, there is nothing abstract about being ambitious or about being upset because you lost a job, etc. In the future, I would encourage the crew to make what they deem "abstract" much more prevalent, if that is their intended focus.

I also found the setting a strange addition. Why was it a sitcom? Kneehigh believe in creating a narrative and being a "servant to the story." I had no idea what this setting added to the story. Perhaps, the crew was stating the irony of the production making a comment on the entertainment industry by being inherently in that same industry. It is such an interesting concept, it just felt lost, but I would love to see it again with a more realised idea around it.

I liked the addition of music. The melody added to the speeches, adding to the intended take-away of the monologues/duologues. The staging was simple and so, so, so effective. I adored the confetti canons; they were beautifully comedic. Anna Robinson was also a drop of sunshine onstage and I would urge other theatre creators to not sleep on the talent showcased on that stage.

In short, An Actor Despairs was lovely. There were creases that needed ironing out of course. However, I believe that this production is a very good indication of the talent in this department and I cannot wait to see it get even better.

Student Workshop Review - An Actor Despairs

An Actor Despairs follows the multiple journeys of young adults in establishing themselves in the 'real world'. An aspiring actor Tom took the decision to pursue theatre straight after high school, but without achieving his big break, he constantly faces feelings of doubting his self-worth, pessimism, and nihilism. Similar feelings occupy his friends, Max and Jack, who also embark on a path of finding their true dreams.

Max Dobson created writing that was earnest, natural and self-aware with versatility ranging from comedic to dramatic. With well-placed and witty call-backs, the script held a steady pace. Adding emotional depth to characters especially Jack, who was predominantly shaped by comedic writing is only one example of writing's versatility. Anna Robinson's monologue stood as an emotional peak of the play, heavily anchored in the writing. In conjunction with the more abstract elements of the play, the pressures from her family, the true meaning of her dreams, and finding "authentic joy" carried incredible emotional weight.

The individuality that the actors brought to each of their characters made them extremely delightful to watch. With support from an exceptional script, they truly embodied their characters' optimism, insecurities and feelings of uncertainty. The character that deviated the most from the Naturalist element was Matthew played by Adam Boshier. But the expectation of such an exaggerated character to be jarring with exceptionally 'normal' characters was immediately proved wrong. As he danced through the audience for his entrance, he became a lovable character that came to represent the most stereotypical and dramatic theatre student anyone can conjure. Coupled with character of Jan, they became an unstoppable comedic duo.

The music was very effectively placed, especially through the transitions. The use of the remix of the song Mbube, with trap elements was an effective choice to reflect the time in which the play is set in. But the song also foreshadowed that Tom's 'peak' is still to be accomplished. The audio-visuals in Max's monologue played like a memory reel which really lifted the scene.

The play between foreground and background scenes created by the staging were well-thought and added more nuance. Beginning from the staging, the play seemed to tilt more towards its naturalist elements like the narrative and characters but when abstract elements were introduced, it succeeded in creating an otherworldly atmosphere, especially during monologues. The mind and thoughts of the characters were represented with abstract Kneehigh elements, which created a world of ambiguity that had no space in the naturalist reality of all the characters' situations. If a balance between the two elements was intended, it fell short of that, but this mixture did not lack execution.

In an added layer of interpretation, Stanislavsky's system and steps of engaging with a character mirrored the character developments as they navigate through the different steps in engaging with their dreams. These steps and feelings were given universality by the play, where students and parents alike were left reflecting on the true meanings of dreams.

A Review of 'Love You Lost'

Directed by Robert Hearn and Joshua Thomas

The play opens with a message from the writer Joshua Thomas, 'For All the Love You Lost'. The overarching aesthetic is dreamy and vivid. Use of light throughout this performance is tantalizing and resourceful; the boxes framed in neon strips look absolutely gorgeous. Contingency in costume may add to this effect, however, on even a basic aesthetic level this piece is rather striking.

The writing needs a little cultivating; however, the relationships are promising. The two sisters sweep the audience into a genuinely convincing sibling relationship. Sprinkles of humour spark great laughter. Ollie Van Hoeken's performance of Jack is utterly charming. The unfinished movie as a metaphor of being left behind by someone dearly loved strikes a deep chord within the audiences which is clearly evident within the silence which follows the monologue.

These monologues carry great rhythm and flow. Eve Hellen smashes her delivery; the audience are captured by her every word. There is an exquisite unquestionable emotionality throughout this performance. The monologues could be pushed even further with more grounding in contingent ideas. The, 'Make your Bed,' monologue is a perfect example of how attaching elaborate concepts to the everyday permeates and moves.

The physical theatre is dancery and enticing, however some of the intentions behind the movements are a little unclear. As audiences, we are thrilled by the risk of physical theatre and I would be excited to see how the stakes could be developed. The spinning lift between Eve Hellen and Ollie Van Hoeken is dangerous and alluring - more moments like this!

An apolitical tone can risk becoming lacklustre if discourse isn't fully engaged with. Therefore, I would be interested to see how contemporary issues of human relationships could be further explored. If you're to infer the suicide of Jack, then infer it. The crippling disorder of anxiety is only touched upon, and yet the visual staging of a panic attack is exceptional. It leaves me wondering why we are leaving mental health in the background of theatre as a subplot or a passing thought. We are in the midst of a mental health crisis and I would love to see this brought into the performance.

This spread to the lesbian relationship. By having two female characters interacting romantically you are immediately engaging in queer discourse. One could sense a great tenderness between Ellena Strestik and Esme Person-Brown. The chemistry between their characters is delightful. We lack theatrical representation of queer communities as it stands. I can see great potential in exploring

issues of LGBT+ equality throughout the performance.

This performance encapsulates a deep emotional longing. I am fascinated to see how this piece may develop and grow. Once the show finishes and the house lights have risen, the audience hang in an atmospheric warmth which carries them from the Caryl Churchill Theatre.

Review of *Love You Lost*

I went into the Caryl Churchill Theatre expecting a cliché love story that I had seen a hundred times before; yet, somehow, I came out in a quite different mindset. The portrayal of 'love' was not uniform, but multifaceted and, at times, very moving and deep. Because the spectre of definitions of 'love' was such a large one, I believe the resonance with the audience was one of impact. If you had never experienced a romantic relationship, for example, the show would still find other ways to slither into the innermost creeks of your heart, and root itself there for a while, even as the days went on.

I must admit my scepticism towards the bare, minimalistic stage when I first found my seat. Yet, once again, my scepticism deteriorated as the cast members created physically stunning pictures. I particularly enjoyed the contrast between Harriot's quiet memory of a painful heartbreak and the next scene at a raving party, with music that pounded in your heart, and smoke that made you tear up. Even such "unimportant" scenes as the commute on the train to the location of the date, was made interesting through use of light in an enclosed space, and - once again - ensemble work. Through creating expressive tableaux, there was cemented an ambience throughout the entirety of the play. None of this would have worked if there was not such an obvious love and connection between each cast member.

In regard to further development, there is a lot to be said about the costumes. When selecting costumes, everything should be considered, and everything should fit into the overall scenic expression of the show. More often than not, I strained trying to see a connection between the garments and the show. There seemed to be no plan in the decision of what the characters should wear. It was almost as though each actor could show up to the performance wearing whatever suited them, and this is not positively contributing to the overall aesthetics. It is understandable that very detailed, extravagant costumes do not unite with how the actors need to fluidly switch between roles, but as an audience member, I wished the ensemble had a specific clothing code in order to not distract from the physical elements that were happening on stage. You catch yourself being distracted by a hair tie on an actor's wrist, the pattern on someone's blouse or the lack of shoes on the cast members. It would raise the professional standard quite the notches if these things were fixed.

However much the lack of footwear annoyed the critical parts of my brain, I left with a looming feeling of bearing witness to *life* that evening. When looking around, I discovered that I was not the only one with this sensation. There was an intangible quality of truthfulness and reality seeping from the gap between the doorframe of the Caryl Churchill Theatre that particular Thursday-night, and for that, I am grateful.

JUNK JUNK JUNK

Barefoot actors meandering freely around the studio, chatting to the audience; actors tearing cardboard boxes apart tooth-and-nail and painstakingly piecing them together again; a building, inescapable cacophony of noise and overlapping stories: JUNK JUNK JUNK is a show like no other.

With a focus on the wastefulness and materialism of the theatre industry itself, this budget less production rolls immersive theatre and ecological awareness into one chaotic, unmissable experience.

It was not what anyone seemed to expect. This production took place on the floor of a large studio using in-the-round staging, giving each audience member a unique vantage point. More strikingly, it had no distinct beginning or end. The only prop was a large cardboard box, and lighting depended solely on torchlights from mobile phones. In this bizarre but exciting approach, the success of this production has to be attributed to its actors.

Through seemingly unchoreographed movements and free-flowing dialogue, the actors were able to achieve a fascinating balance between solitary and group interactions. One actress's experimentation as a shadow-puppeteer transformed into joyous comic relief when Niamh Smith used her own shadow to attempt to 'lift her up.' Interestingly, there was an acute focus on numbers. The performers, somewhere amid their various anecdotes, frequently offered a contextless number into the air. Each number found its context through conversation: Lucy Doig requesting numbers in a re-enactment of 'Countdown,' the amount of bricks in the room, how much energy is used manufacturing a single pair of jeans. Alone, these figures were useless. Together, they created a worrying picture, reminding us of the sheer volume of items produced in the world, with no easy answer for where all this junk ends up.

Each actor was charmingly creative, unafraid to 'yes and' their fellow actors, following new leads - one of which led to Dylan Rowe giving a startling piggyback ride. These unplanned moments of collaboration were a delight, and communicated a message of unity: that, alone, our actions can be incomprehensible and amount to very little, but, combined, bring about a remarkable effect, and even positive change.

I would argue that there is room for improvement in this piece. As a piece of immersive and explorative theatre, it was undeniably a success. JUNK posed questions, inviting its audience to search for answers in amongst the giddy disorder of the play. The performance built nicely in terms of pacing, particularly as the lights turned off and the performers broke unspoken rules, such as addressing the audience. However, there did come a point when the pacing failed to build any further and would have benefitted from further nuance or even a greater sense of focus. Despite this, the show was not lacking - rather, it has untapped potential to cross even more lines. I would be excited to see where else this production could go, considering the remarkable talent already shown. This performance both figuratively and literally crossed lines, resulting in a show that felt just as much like a conversation with the audience as it did between the actors themselves.

"Excuse Me, Can I have a Leaf out of that Book?"

The Beautiful Absurdity of 'Junk Junk Junk'

There is no definitive beginning of this performance. The cast join you on your walk upstairs, chatting openly. The conversation of the cast adopts a more performative overtone as the audience's chatter fizzles out.

The water bottles onstage, the use of the DSM as an indicator of timing, the mobile phones as torches - there's nothing concealed about this performance. The influences of Forced Entertainment were particularly prevalent in how unapologetically outward the show was. Hannah directly turning to me after taking a drink and saying, "Minty, It's Minty. I forgot it tastes Minty," was a lovely instance of humour highlighting the theatrical intimacy maintained within the room.

Interactions overlapped and games were played between performers. There is a beautiful sense of play. A solid area of development could be in refining these games played between performers. Games performed under duration need clear goals in order to engage the audience. When searching through a box with a torch, show you are looking for something specific. This way you have the audience's investment in achieving the goal, regardless of whether it is accomplished or not.

Dialogue is fragmented and hardly delivered outwardly. One has to work to listen to what the performers are saying. Many of the segments included word play and Lucy Doig's ramble about the fluctuations in the price of a plastic bag of chips was a fascinating moment. Themes of commercialism, materialism and the deterioration of language ran throughout the play and I would be excited to see how these themes could be extended.

A thrilling moment was when Dylan Rowe lifted Hannah Harding; her legs over his shoulders, holding her feet and carrying her on his back. This difficult lift to attempt radiated trust between performers. I held my breath every time Dylan took a hand-off Hannah's feet to gesture to the audience. There was something exceptionally tantalizing about this section, which was further juxtaposed by Dylan's bumbling ramble and Hannah's repeated, "Bloops".

The elements of physical theatre were scattered and intriguing. When movement enters the realm of difficult or dangerous even, the audience grow enthralled. More moments of weight play, more lifts and more contact improvisation would certainly elevate the show.

As for the sustainability of the production, it was self-contained and efficient. The shadow play up the wall of RS2 with phone torches was certainly resourceful. Extending these themes into the dialogue would amplify the intentions of the theatre company as minimalism is already regarded as relatively economical.

Another striking moment was when Dylan ripped open the central box, which I believe was accidental, completely tearing through the audience's light mood. I would be intrigued to see more of these instances of stillness and silence in the performance.

'Junk Junk Junk,' presented itself far more as a charming piece of walking art rather than a play. It forced one to be perceptive to the bodies in the space and to truly listen to what was taking place. I am utterly fascinated to see how it develops.

Ripped Cardboard, Ripped Childhood

The depleted childhood of 'Junk Junk Junk'

The Studio Production 'Junk Junk Junk' from the Student Workshop ran on the evenings of the 28th and 29th of October can certainly be defined as one of a kind. It is not the main question 'what role can theatre practice play in sustainability?' the major feature of this production. As a matter of fact, many are the performances, especially in the last decade, that went down the path of free-budget productions, relations with scavenging, space and objects surrounding us.

What strikes us the most are the "*in-use definitions*" implied throughout the whole show. For "*in use definitions*" Ayer indicated 'a symbol... showing how the sentences in which it significantly occurs can be translated into equivalent sentences. In this sense, we can individuate our in-use definition in the undercurrent relations between the idea of a neo-liberal, late capitalist and multinational-ruled market-society, and the consumers of this market-society immersed in what could be defined as a *present dystopia of wastage*.

The translation of such a definition is easily readable in the childhood-adulthood contraposition underpinned throughout the whole performance. Since the beginning, the small talks going on between the performers, the childish games and sounds present us a fully grown-up kindergarten. The performers are at the same time children and adult, playing this trembling game of knowledge and ignorance wherein greed lies as the obnoxious and invisible background. In this fluctuating and never-ending exchange of balance, the idea of multinationals' exploitation slithers in every action an image undergoing in the show. The ripped cardboard stays as a Symbol, an unheard, ridiculed but visible voice: waste has become our true creed, and greed is its cult.

The ripped cardboard goes in parallel with the idea of a ripped childhood once broken you cannot put it back together. What Junk Junk Junk tries to communicate to the audience is that the childhood displayed is not only a role game to define the relation between multinationals and consumers, but the true notch of the conversation that, still, is ignored and casted aside. A conversation where the interlocutors are merely our most profound and most loathsome contradictions. What Junk Junk Junk is shouting towards our faces is to stop "looking for our piece of paper" and start doing something meaningful, avoiding the covering of our wrongdoings with environmental words. Just like the cardboard laying on the floor at the end of the performance, here we are as tired scatters of people, ripped children, deprived of their role in changing the world.

'An Actor Despairs' review

An electric amalgamation of comedic writing and stellar performances, 'An Actor Despairs' not only had audience members guffawing in their seats, but also emotionally engaging with characters in moments of adversity.

Upon entering the theatre, the audience were greeted by a rather sparse stage, but familiar hallmarks such as empty cans and red solo cups hinted that the action of the play was set close to home. The chemistry between Tom and Jack (two best friends played by Cameron Wight and Ethan Chappell-Mason), immediately grabbed the audience's attention. Max Dobson's writing combined with Chappell-Mason's ebullient, boisterous performance made Jack an excellent foil for the more self-conscious Tom. Chappell-Mason quickly proved himself to be a natural comedian and his charisma was palpable whenever he was on stage.

Comedy was not in short supply in this production. Isha Kahira and Adam Boshier made a brilliant double-act playing the fiercely competitive Jan and Matthew and their histrionics always resulted in audience laughter. Kahira's gum-chewing, grouchy receptionist made a fantastic counterpart to Boshier's hilarious parody of an aspiring thespian. The play's self-deprecating jokes about the trope of the suffering artist were refreshing and expertly executed. Boshier unabashedly milked every moment on stage and his hysterical fit after getting rejected for the role of 'Vicar 4' was a particular highlight. Moreover, the play's fully fledged meta elements were not simply added - as metatheatrical jokes so often are - in an attempt to be 'edgy': they contrasted sombre moments and added hilarity to the play.

Dobson's thematic choices were apposite for an audience filled with young adults: issues such as self-doubt, rebelling against your parents and choosing a career were maturely discussed. Chappell-Mason showcased his ability to traverse a wide emotional spectrum by revealing a much softer side to his character after he loses his job: Jack turns out to be much more than just comic relief and his reflective speech on needing to find purpose felt incredibly genuine.

Another moment where Dobson's writing shone was when Max realises that her true calling is to be a fashion designer. In this scene, she addresses the audience and the play moves away from the world of naturalism into a more abstract presentation of events. This abstraction was jarring at first, perhaps due to the sudden switch to Max's perspective, the dramatic change in lighting (a spotlight on Max and the rest of the stage in comparative darkness) and the use of physical theatre to underline the key points of the monologue. This juxtaposition of abstraction and naturalism, however, enabled Dobson to write in the vernacular as well as showcase a more poetic style. Max's monologue could have easily sounded saccharine or glib, but Dobson's poignant metaphors proved that his writing is not confined by the language of the everyday.

In all, 'An Actor Despairs' was a masterclass in balancing what is heartfelt and genuine with straight-up silly comedy and I look forward to see what the members of this project decide to tackle next.

Love You Lost Review

It is natural human instinct to avoid conflict and runaway from overwhelming emotions. With Love You Lost, one is not given that choice. For an hour you are plunged into a world of pain, joy, heartbreak and laughter, facing a whirlwind of emotions head on.

Love You Lost is a non-naturalistic physical theatre piece that follows the story of two girls on a date. Over the course of their date, they each have flashbacks to specific moments in their lives with special people. The integration of spoken word text, purple and blue hues in the lighting design, the melancholic music and even the fog machine work brilliantly together to create a dream-like quality to the production. Just like dreams, moments in life are fleeting and it reminds us to cherish each moment while it lasts.

The acting was amazing. From the reserved Alex still healing from the wounds left by the death of her best friend to the nervous Harriot who is afraid to let herself love again because of a previous failed relationship, the two lead actresses Ellena Strestik and Esme Person-Brown delivered nuanced performances that left the audience rooting for them in the end. The show had a strong ensemble as well. In particular, props to Kara Jehan who played Katie, the comic element of the play, with just the right amount of feistiness so that it was not over the top.

The physical elements such as lifts and tableaux contributing to the surrealistic atmosphere in the play, emphasizing on the intangible moments in life. Although there were times when the physical elements seemed to appear out of nowhere during a naturalistic scene which made it slightly jarring, it did not take away from the overall experience. The usage of human bodies to represent South Bank or torch lights to illustrate the stars was very creative and effectively transported the audience into the world of the play.

The overall mood of the play was rather mellow, but that in and of itself was a brilliant director choice. No big climax or loud clash of conflict, just two budding lovers taking a trip down memory lane. Love You Lost is a hauntingly beautiful portrayal of loss and gain, that invites the audience to reminiscence about their own lives as well. It is a timeless reminder that there is always a silver lining no matter how dark the sky may seem