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## Low Tide in Glass Bay at The White Theatre, Bristol

October 3, 2014

★★★★★

Last night *Low Tide in Glass Bay* had its debut performance at The White

Theatre, Bristol after a critically acclaimed run at the Edinburgh Festival.

Complete with team sweatshirts and glowing reviews, there's no doubt that the coveted venue, the Underbelly was swept off its feet. Written by Eliot Salt and Artemis Howard and directed by Max Kirk, this Deadpan Theatre production is an uplifting and at times thought-provoking coming-of-age story with a heart.

Set in the depths of rural Wales, the play follows the story of a happy-go-lucky lesbian couple Karen and Bronnie as they guide their loveable, but naïve niece Robwyn through the perils of puberty. Living life under a blissful haze of booze, laughter and Singapore noodles, the death of Robwyn's mother suddenly plunges them into the reality of the trials and tribulations of modern parenting. Simultaneously, their neighbour, the high maintenance and impertinent *femme d'affaires* Lynette is defrosting before our eyes and we the audience are brought along on a journey, which observes the maturing of not only Robwyn and her aunts, but also her adolescent love interest George and his fatiguing family.

Directed by Max Kirk, the cast were so well selected it seemed as if the characters were written for them personally. The playwrights Artemis and Eliot bounced off each other in the roles of the vivacious duo Karen and Bronnie with an enviable of mischief and devotion. They looked fabulous as they spun in and out in a whirlwind of kaleidoscopic ensembles. My memory of them both emerging in dreary dressing gowns with wild manes of morning-after hair only catalysed the comedy. Markedly, this endless presentation of curious costumes was perfectly juxtaposed with the consistency of the set, which was never changed except for the odd bit of flaccid birthday cake.

The bohemian set served to magnify the eccentricities of the characters as it went from hosting birthday parties and rehearsals to moments of bittersweet desolation and eventually some romance. Attention to detail was illustrated by the carefully selected range of scholarly literature to suit

Bronnie's career as a writer as well as piles of scripts to align with Robwyn's burgeoning passion for the performing arts. The limitless supply of wine also added to the comic appeal of the production - given the lack of differentiation between an adult and child's appropriate consumption. In terms of symbolism, my personal highlight had to be the poignancy of the perishing pot plants on stage left, which alluded to the distinct lack of maternal instinct on the part of the aunts.

The smooth delivery of beautifully crafted lines like "*she's slow, like a slug in treacle*" and "*I feel a visit from the migraine fairy approaching*" had us all gasping for breath. But, despite the fact that this was a comedy, it's important to stress that the play was as moving as it was amusing. We were lifted up and down as we rode its wave. Frequently, the abundance of laughter melted away to reveal more serious undertones. With underlying, somewhat penetrating themes like grief, sexuality, isolation and alcoholism we were drawn in further to their labyrinth of emotional experience. We weren't just peeking through the window, but being led through the door of this unconventional families life to be shown a different way of existing to our own, one that we might relate to in more ways than we'd expect.

Notably, I felt intensely involved in the developing relationship between the adolescents Robwyn and George, played by Robyn and Hector. Even when they were at the back of a scene their facial expressions were so delicately manipulated that there was no doubt in my mind that they were utterly infatuated with each other. But, it wasn't simply lust; it was the childlike curiosity that it takes great skill for an actor to re-create. Both actors carried off the illusion of young love with such truthfulness and intensity that I felt an enormous sense of loss when the play ended and we parted with their story. Truthfully, watching the pair act was a nostalgic experience as I relived the tenderness of my early romantic endeavours, before realising that we've all grown up and that untainted view of love has long since departed.

The White Theatre venue was wonderfully intimate, but also allowed for a dynamic range of movement like the endless dashing around, celebratory dancing and the particularly titillating vision of Owen and Karen practicing their whisking. Not only by Deadpan's subtle approach to physical theatre and impeccable Welsh accents, but also by the intensely witty writing and high calibre acting, the audience were utterly bewitched from beginning to end. Given the depressing reality of generation 'instant gratification', there's no doubt that it's increasingly rare to completely grip an audience's attention for the duration of a theatrical production. However, as I looked around Low Tide in Glass Bay, the effect of the play was truly hypnotic, the audience were all visibly seduced by its boundless wit as they perched on the edges of their seats. In short, I urge you to go and see it tonight. It's more than a play, it's an immersive experience.

In Theatre, Bristol, Performance

Tags Underbelly, Edinburgh Festival, Comedy, Bristol, Deadpan Theatre

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