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Tender Napalm (http://upstagedreviews.weebly.com/reviews/tender-napalm)

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By Philip Ridley
Directed by Alexander Butt
Brevity Theatre in association with Red Line Productions
Old Fitz Theatre
129 Dowling Street, Woolloomooloo
Season: 19 – 30 January

I should preface this review by saying: I love Philip Ridley's work. He writes with an articulate decadence that is capable of fully capturing the figurative yin and yang of humanity. He refuses to simplify stereotyped characters, banal on the palate, which is vastly fascinating for audiences as a rare sight on the stage. He is deeply poetic and deeply imaginative, and I find great truth to emanate from his craft - in place of a contrived tale that is dramatic for drama's sake. Thus, when artists take his writing to the stage, I sure do have high expectations. Brevity Theatre dive into Tender Napalm with leaps and somersaults, fulfilling and exceeding expectations.



Photo credit to Andre Vasquez

The play presents a boy meets girl situation, yet in no standard form. The work vacillates anachronistically between the real and the imagined, leaving the audience with a clear understanding at the close of the work of the gravity of the couple's experience, as well as of their coping mechanisms found in storytelling. Through this journey, we witness a relationship in a spectrum, canvassing tender sensuality, affection, as well as bitter loss – capable of inflicting an implosion at the core of their relationship. Jordan Cowan and Tim Franklin, as the girl and boy respectively, enact a rigorous vitality throughout the work. And yet, their performances also encompass a sensitivity that's power is augmented when it is subverted through violence and the desire to harm. This exploration is pertinent, that at each person's base desire resides the want of sex, love, and the power to damage those who are capable of damaging us. Perhaps this yearning for violent power is heightened when we experience the utter powerlessness when it is externally inflicted on us. Cowan and Franklin wrap up these complex nuances in their performance, displaying sophisticated skill and charisma. Notably, this piece requires physical stamina due to Matt Cornell's highly effective choreography, in conjunction with the dialogue presented solely by the two actors. This stamina is successfully maintained, precipitating a kinetic atmosphere at its highest energy, contrasted against the quiet when action seems to cease.

Alexander Butt's direction triumphs in the connection we as an audience develop with the characters on stage. Somewhat prying into utterly intimate moments of their lives – we warm to these figures, we can relate to them. This warmth prevails even when violent dispositions are exposed, as we travel with them through the abstract realm temporarily materialised on stage. Through this carefully established connection, we cannot bow to the abhorrence we usually give forth as we peer into an uneasy mirror held up to life. Exquisite on every level, Butt's direction ties together the work of two fantastic actors with stunning chemistry. Brevity Theatre has created a theatrical wonder, and it's a sweet sorrow that theatre can be so alive on stage, yet is never to be relived again.



Emily Richardson

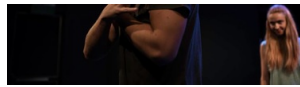
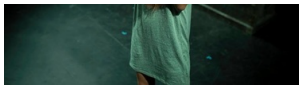
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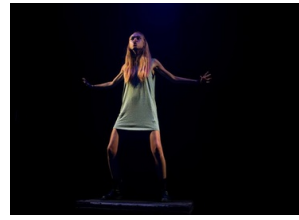
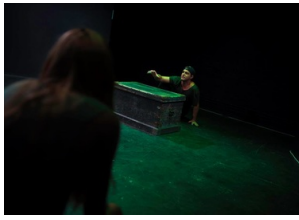


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