

Fringe Review

London Fringe

Shaft



Venue:

Etcetera Theatre, Camden

Low Down

Aptly named Infectious this new theatre company has an empowering and interesting piece on their hands with Debra Stych's *Shaft*. Set in the backstage dressing room of a boutique lapdancing club shaft explores the stories of 7 girls who all have various reasons for being there.

Review

The strength of this piece comes from the excellent ensemble work and yet lets the fine individual talents of the performers shine through. There is room for the plot to develop further to extend on the character development but in its current form it is well developed for a first run.

Though fairly predictable, *Shaft* takes a convincing look at all the different kind of girls who would work in a lap dancing club. Saskia (Lyndal Marwick) the new girl who quickly becomes Mimi is just the right level of frustrating. She crashes into a world she doesn't understand and ignores all advice ending up burnt because of both her ignorance and belief that she is better than those around her. Marwick captures the character well turning the audience against her and yet maintaining enough respect to win them back when required. Antonia meadows shines as aptly named Bambi, an innocent acting fun loving girl whose heart on sleeve

behaviour leaves her open to finding herself in compromising situations. Meadows lights up the stage with her bubbly personality and funny one liners. Nathalie Meyer is explosive as the feisty French dynamo Crystal, whose regular flurry of French expletive outbursts add colour and an international flavour to the otherwise English centric production. In fact another foreign character wouldn't go astray in helping round off this cast.

Not content with just exploring the dirty underbelly of lapdancing the performers use their skill set rooted in the teaching of Jacques Le Coque to bring an essential physicality to *Shaft* which sets it aside as highly theatrical physical theatre, avoiding potential connotations that would set it in an overtly sexual category and attract a perhaps very different audience.

The central prop is the iconic lap dancing pole which is well utilised and could in fact be used more. Sophie Page-Hall playing Envy uses the pole with utmost skill in the climactic moment of the play making pole dancing (and it really is dancing) come across as a beautiful art form. Her background in circus performance and skills in aerialism mean she was able to use the pole to best advantage and this 2 minute display of skills is by far the most interesting and poignant moment in the play. As she hangs in mid air with only her legs securing her to the pole there is a very alive silence present in the room from the audience. She holds both them and herself suspended in disbelief at the beauty of the moment. By combining physical theatre with emotional content Debra Stych who also directs her writing has managed to ensure that the world of lapdancing though seedy has a heart underneath the grime.

I hope this play has further life after Camden Fringe as it thoroughly deserves a full run perhaps in another more suitable space. It would be great to see a show like this at the Union or the White Bear where the space would complement the content. Debra Stych is a writer to watch and if *Shaft* is in town again don't miss it.

viewed by Skye Crawford 30th August 2009

Website :

www.infectioustheatre.com

