

# British Theatre Guide

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## A Forest

Pacitti Company  
Barbican Pit  
(2009)

On a mound of shiny copper coins, twelve feet in diameter, a naked man lies on his side, a row of little plastic trees fixed to his skin with hot red candle wax to make a wooded landscape. Between his legs he clutches the antlers of a stag, curving up to obscure his genitals. Cloth dolls are collected from the audience and semi-buried around him among the coins. Over him are laid the forked branches of a tree. This is an intriguing image in itself but now the other two performers hang paper money from the branches: £5,000 in Bank of England £50 denomination notes. How often do most people outside the banking business see that kind of cash, let alone whatever all those two-penny pieces add up to. This ending is the best bit of this show, but what is the show all about? I noticed one of my colleagues, who is much more enthusiastic about performance art than I tend to be, creep out before we got this far. I'll be interested to see what she says!

Here is a piece that tries to tick several boxes: a poetic text, strong visual images, nudity - and he's a not bad looking bearded youth who is dressed and kneeling blindfolded at the start - and audience involvement: a woman hands us pennies as we arrive to sit in a single circle - later an offertory box is brought round to collect them. There are rag dolls on our seats; they get collected for their burial. But somehow I never felt involved in any way. These actions had no real meaning - unless what was later done with them was a token miserliness or a sacrifice of ones children for our greed. For from interacting with us the voice that is presumably supposed to be heard in our heads is from a man standing in our circle whispering into a microphone like a male Laurie Anderson or the whispering singer who used to be with the Temperance Seven.

It begins with a text that suggests we are going to get an exploration of dark forest myths but takes that nowhere, and it ends questioning 'What do we really want?' (no, not the Spice Girl's version) and suggests a range of answers from being fucked really hard to a new home, a lover in a smart suit, a bright shiny new car or just money, money, money?

Between times we have the young man rolling in money, thrusting his body against it, until the woman wriggles herself beneath him. Late she writes MINE among his arm. Ownership: is that what money brings? A means of satisfying desires? Are those buried babies?

I sometimes feel that what separates theatre as we usually think of it from what increasingly is being called 'performance art' is a refusal to carry any message but to present a few images, a few deliberately half-formed ideas and let the audience make of it what they can. It is theatre being taken over by the fine art world, not the theatre of the performer. People don't so much act as do things. I don't mean that these performers don't have skills. Dancing on a pile of coins is one of them - you try it, and being unflinching when melted wax is poured upon your skin and runs down your body.

It held my attention for its 60 minutes but rarely engaged me, though director Robert Pacitti (if it was he) whispered with such cool precision and perhaps the contradiction of being with us but speaking through a microphone was meant to emphasise the alienation of the individual in modern life. Splendidly atmospheric music by Sebastian Castagna circles around the space recorded in surround sound that inter-meshes with and sometimes drowns the whisper, and the simple setting is beautifully lit. The other performers are Sheila Ghelani and Richard Eton.

It is intended to be an unsettling piece and, for some audiences, it may be. I am perhaps too used to sexual imagery and language in other work and all too aware of contemporary greed and the corrupting power of money to find it disturbing. But beautiful it frequently succeeds in being.

*At Barbican Pit until 9th April 2009*

*Presented as part of the SPILL Festival of Performance*

**Reviewer:** [Howard Loxton](#)