

# British Theatre Guide

News, reviews, features and podcast on theatre across the UK

## The American Pilot

David Greig

RSC at Live Theatre, Newcastle

(2005)

A remote village in a country torn by civil war. An American warplane crashes and a local farmer finds the injured pilot nearby. He brings him to his farm and treats his wounds, and sends for a village councillor, a trader, who summons the local militia captain. What is to be done with him?

The village could be anywhere. It has an Islamic feel to it, but the only people who are given names, the wife and daughter of the farmer, are called Evie and Sarah - not Islamic names. Nor is the dress of the local people an indicator of place: some wear Islamic dress reminiscent of Afghanistan; Evie and Sarah wear clothing which has gypsy overtones; the others are generic European, and the Captain's full uniform resembles that of the Russian army. In other words, Greig and director Ramin Gray don't want us to site it specifically: it is enough that it is far distant and in turmoil.

What interests Greig is the reactions of the characters to this visitation from a country which has almost mythical status and the way in which some try to use his presence to further their own agendas, whether political, financial or personal.

For all its simple setting, designed by Lizzie Clachan, the play itself is complex, opening up the minds and hearts of the characters, all of whom come under Greig's spotlight at some point in the hundred minutes for which it runs. He uses both dialogue and monologue to reveal them to us, from Tom Hodgkins' good-hearted farmer to Paul Chahidi's translator, tortured by the past and torn by the conflicting emotions arising from his time in the US and his commitment to Marxism-Leninism.

The least fully-realised character, in fact, is the American Pilot himself (played by David Rogers). He is not a cipher, but there is no turmoil in his mind, apart from that inflicted by the physical pain he suffers. His convictions are firm: he will be rescued - his "guys" are coming to save him, as, of course, they do in a scene which is scarily effective in the confined, intimate black box space of Live.

With a bare set and a few well-chosen props, and with the characters all onstage all the time, sitting against the back wall watching the action when they are "off-stage", everything is thrown onto the actors. The audience's closeness to the action - within inches of the front row on occasion - means that a turn of the eye or a twist of the mouth have great significance, and the actors do not disappoint.

In an ensemble piece such as this, performed by actors such as these, it is not just invidious but impossible to single anyone out. Many eyes, of course, will be on David Rintoul, because of his TV fame, but the great strength of this company is that he did not stand out: beautifully performed!

Philip Fisher [reviewed](#) this production when it transferred to the Soho Theatre

Reviewer: [Peter Lathan](#)