

British Theatre Guide

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American Poodle

Guy Masterson and Brian Parks

Guy Masterson Productions - TTI

Riverside Studios

(2009)

This is a double bill of two short plays that look at that very special UK-US relationship: *Snowball*, by Masterson, offers a potted history of the creation of the USA from the British view, and *Splayfoot* by Parks, which presents us with the reactions of an American businessman on a first visit to the UK to finalise the acquisition of a very special piece of British heritage. Both are performed by Masterson himself, directed in the first by Peter McNally and in the second by David Calvito.

Supported only by a couple of chairs and a table, Masterson peoples the stage for *Snowball* with everything from the first (Welsh) discovery of the Americas (centuries before Columbus expedition) through the Jamestown settlement, the early colonists who in 15 years used guns and smallpox to bump off 110 million indigenous Americans, to the Founding Fathers, together with a truly manic portrayal of raving farmer George (the third) and America's George (the first) - general, then president Washington.

This isn't just a series of clever cameo creations; it is a high-speed history lesson which makes it points with an ease, authority, pace and timing that I haven't seen since Alan Taylor's lectures in the early days of commercial television. Bitingly accurate (allowing for a little Welsh exaggeration) and it is very, very funny. This is not to be missed.

I wish I could say the same for *Splayfoot*. Masterson gives it the same energy and attack but he just doesn't have such good material to work with. While the first piece takes a scathing look at both Britain and America (for it is a history lesson with plenty of contemporary reflection) this American-authored piece gives us an American ass, the kind you can sell Tower Bridge to on a street corner. It certainly doesn't lash the British. Here is a man whose ideas of Britain seem to come from Chaucer (he may be stupid but he's educated!), crass and insensitive, imposing quaintness everywhere with no attempt to point up just how quaint the UK may really be! Masterson still makes us laugh and the holy relics that this twentieth-century Chaucer Pilgrim thinks he's taking back will outrage some, so there is certainly an idea there that could be much more exploited if it were used as more than a final punch line.

Even in this Masterson won't bore you. He has comic playing at his fingertips and knows how to turn the slightest technical glitch to his advantage (indeed it may now be part of the script) but this is an unequal pairing.

At Riverside until 24th January 2009

Reviewer: [Howard Loxton](#)