

# British Theatre Guide

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## Anamnesis 25.12

Shane Anderson, Jodie Ashdown, Bethan Jones, Bethan Morgan, Jaye Swift, Owen Thomas  
Mercury Theatre Wales  
Chapter, Cardiff  
16–20 December 2014

“Anamnesis” is active remembering, the act of re-experiencing past events, whether in a therapeutic or religiously contemplative context.

For this Christmas-themed production, partly inspired by stories gleaned from interviews with members of the local community, Mercury Theatre Wales has chosen to explore dark, largely unfestive memories.

The action starts in the foyer, with free wine and mince pies, and a drunken Santa wandering around being rude to people. Then a smiling nurse appears, and gratefully welcomes us into the theatre.

For it is Christmas Day, and we, the audience, are a group of carol-singers, arrived to bring good cheer to a dreary, mixed hospital ward. A few of us have also been handed gifts to give to selected patients when prompted.

We are introduced to the elderly, incoherent, bed-bound Stephen, who receives Skype messages from his globe-trotting granddaughter and her boyfriend. We also meet a sullen teenager, a troubled father, and a couple of spirited older ladies. As they are handed their packages, stories of past Christmases are evoked in a portmanteau format.

For this production, the theatre's performance area has been converted into a promenade space, and over the 90-minute running time it is continually transformed into various living-rooms, dining-rooms and dance-halls.

The presentation, directed by Bethan Morgan, is highly imaginative, with audience awkwardness cleverly factored into the many scene-changes. Dan Young's lighting effects work well as do Holly Guenevieve's video projections.

The stories themselves, though well written, are perhaps a little less innovative—there is a family with money worries, a ghost story which is left unresolved, and an amusing but superficial festive farce. A dance-themed World War II montage is well executed (choreography by Phil Williams), if a tad over-long; and Stephen's Skype saga ends anti-climactically.

The performances are generally very effective, with each actor taking on a number of roles. Lynn Hunter scores highly as an over-excited child, a sarcastic teenager and a feisty nonagenarian. John Cording's brief turn as Churchill also impresses as do Louisa Marie Lorey's imperturbable nurse, Dean Rehman's Hispanic vagrant, Francois Pandolfo's unhappy teen and Sarah-Louise Tyler's exasperated sit-com housewife.

We can all identify with the theme of the dysfunctional family forced to confront loss and unhappiness at a time of mandatory jollity, and *Anamnesis 25.12* went down well with the guest night audience. One does wonder, however, whether a suite of more fully developed stories would have hit more deeply.

Nevertheless, this is a slickly likeable entertainment, and one whose themes are all too easy to relate to.

**Reviewer:** [Othniel Smith](#)