

# British Theatre Guide

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## Angels of the Universe

Einar Mar Gudmundsson

Gate Theatre

(2003)

This is a charming and very touching piece that belies its unpromising premise. A one-man show about a lunatic does not sound like much fun, but don't be fooled.

Neil Haigh has adapted *Angels of the Universe* from the Icelandic and performs as Paul, a man destined for the Klepp Psychiatric Hospital from before birth.

Aided by Agusta Skuladottir's direction, a simple but cleverly-designed set from Gudrun Oyahals and musical interludes, Haigh paints a picture, in words, of the increasingly neurotic Paul Olafson, a young man with violent tendencies.

Paul can seem perfectly rational but always seems to get into scrapes that ensure that he is never long out of the hospital. Each episode adds to our understanding of a man who seems happy with his lot - whether as a result of drugs or his nature is a little uncertain.

The style varies: there is speech directed at the audience, at one stage from amongst them; there is mime and also some cleverly created scenes where Paul talks or interacts with doctors, friends and other patients.

The whole builds to a touching representation not only of Paul but also his doctor and two other inmates. These are Ole, who is in the process of writing the whole of the Beatles' canon but cannot get his royalties paid and Victor who talks with Dante and periodically thinks that he is Adolf Hitler.

The thing about all three of them is that they generally seem as normal as anyone else. Their occasional lapses into eccentric behaviour are often harmless but keep them incarcerated.

The highlight is a jaunt by the three men for a friend's funeral during which they blag a meal in a most original way much to the amusement of the audience.

This is a heart-warming play packed with subtle humour. Like the best art, it makes one look at aspects of life afresh. As Gudmundsson tells us in the prologue and repeats in the epilogue, "The madhouse is in a lot of places". Even if you do not consider yourself mad, you might learn a lot from a visit to see *Angels of the Universe* at the Gate.

**Reviewer:** [Philip Fisher](#)