

# British Theatre Guide

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## Blood On The Snow

Caroline Sabin

Chapter / No Fit State

No Fit State - Four Elms

19–23 December 2014

No Fit State is best known for its large-scale, new-age-circus-style extravaganzas. This guest production, whilst using its rehearsal space, a converted church not far from Cardiff city centre, is a more intimate proposition.

Prior to this promenade performance, the audience is addressed by technical manager Gerald Tyler, who gives the customary “mobile 'phones off” and “no food and drink” warnings a sinister edge, noting that the creatures whose environment we are about to enter might well be unpredictable.

We are then ushered into the body of the church, which has been transformed into a Narnia-esque wintry forest glade—an open space encircled by snow-covered fir-trees. The first thing we see is a figure on the ground, calmly knitting a blood-red garment. Another woman arrives, riding a tricycle which is pulling a carriage on which sits a harp.

As the first dryad starts playing said instrument, other nymph-like creatures appear, clad in red coats. They start to skitter around the space, inquisitively approaching members of the audience, sprinkling snowflakes on their heads, or pressing magic beans into their hands.

The narrative is sparse. As well as the skittering, there is frolicking, and a modicum of cavorting. Every now and again, a loud knock is heard and a gift is delivered—a box containing a toy Santa Claus.

Suddenly, the tone darkens. The red costumes are shed to reveal black ones. One unfortunate creature is chased down, caught, and hoisted into the air on a harness. On descending, she appears to die, merging into the forest floor.

As well as movement, there is also song—the piece is structured around Benjamin Britten’s “A Ceremony Of Carols”. *Blood On The Snow* might be crudely characterised as a long-form music video given three-dimensional life.

Aside from the lyrical content of the carols, action proceeds generally without text, until the climax, when troupe leader Caroline Sabin (credited with concept, direction, design, choreography, and text) recites a climactic earth-mother-inflected poem. Finally, a strangely familiar white-bearded figure (played by writer and broadcaster Jon Gower) appears, and is delighted to receive a gift, being more accustomed to giving them.

Needless to say, the music is sublime, Bethan Semmens’s harp beautifully complementing the ensemble’s voices. The performers are multi-talented, all powerful vocalists as well as dancers. Sabin, Eddie Ladd (something of a performance art legend in these parts), Beth Powlesland, Kylie

Ann Smith and Lara Ward are all credited as co-choreographers, and along with musical director Tianyi Lu, are highly effective as eerie elfin presences.

Doubtless there are numerous references to ancient pagan mythology which were lost on me. Even so, *Blood On The Snow* is a magically immersive 75-minute experience—strange, beautiful, and just creepy enough.

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