

British Theatre Guide

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Blue Eyes and Heels

Toby Whitehouse
Soho Theatre
(2005)

Staged by Jonathan Lloyd as two 45-minute rounds between the good guys and the bad Blue Eyes versus the Heels this is a fight with no holds barred, between quality television and the rush to dumb down in a youth-obsessed world, ending with a knock-out but no decision.

Martin Freeman plays Duncan with cocky relish, an ambitious junior TV producer charged with getting wrestling back on our small screens.

But he comes up against the past glories represented by John Stahl as Victor, a member of wrestlings close-knit fraternity, whose place in the limelight as a hooded, fairy tale villain, was suddenly lost when Greg Dyke put a stop to the game on ITV way back in 1988.

Whether faked wrestling bouts could ever have made for a Golden Age of small-screen entertainment is highly debatable. But Victor, a bashful, shambling figure, represents the former values of truth and decency, a relic of the days when working class Saturdays were spent watching bruising heroes slugging it out for a taste of fame.

While Victor is being cruelly exploited and inevitably dumped, battle is also joined between Martins Duncan, making a powerful case for blood, tits and beer on the box, and studio gofer Emma, beautifully portrayed by Serena Evans as a cynical insider who loathes what she sees as a worthless mix of porn and the shopping channel.

Toby Whitehouses superbly written three-hander reminded me strongly of Brian Friels *Faith Healer*, sustained dialogue replacing Friels extended solo pieces but with equal impact, both comic and sad. It could make a brilliant one-off play for television, except that in a multichannel world we no longer enjoy the luxury of one-off plays.

But set throughout in a wrestling ring, the physical dangers of live theatre offer even more compelling viewing, with priceless clowning as Freeman struggles on the ropes, or gets caught in a headlock with the ageing star; and moments of touching tenderness as Victor caresses his tin box of nostalgic photographs and gives Emma a master-class in the noble art of fakery.

Reviewer: [John Thaxter](#)