

# British Theatre Guide

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## Bon Voyage

Paul Nicholson and Richie Grice

Boom Boom Productions

Epstein Theatre, Hanover Street, Liverpool

10–14 September 2013

“Don’t forget to laugh, everybody!” offers a helpful usher as we enter the auditorium.

There are a couple of good things about this returning production of *Bon Voyage*. Certain members of the audience find it hysterically funny, many others laugh a lot. Everybody, myself included, finds something to laugh at.

The other positive thing about Boom Boom Productions’s show is that it offers an evening in the theatre that won’t make anyone who grew up on a Liverpool housing estate feel excluded (and I write as someone who grew up on a Bolton housing estate, so I’m aware of how intimidating a theatrical environment can be). Mind you, they won’t feel challenged or moved, either.

The two-act script has the simplest of premises: the family (widow Maggie, daughter Lisa and father-in-law Archie) and friends (Bumper, Dazzler and Plonk) of the recently departed Rocky meet, pre- and post-funeral, to share memories and spit bile at the deceased and each other. There isn’t really a story-driver here, just a series of gags, none of them new. Most of the laughs fall under the heading of jokes that were ‘old when your father was a lad’. The rest were old when your grandfather was a lad (feel free to join in with the punchline for the story about the heavy drinker who drowns in a vat of alcohol during a trip to the brewery).

One or two moments promise stories that never materialise (Q. is the makeshift, homemade jukebox ‘possessed’? A. We’ll never know, as the writers use it as a ruse for cheap gags rather than developing it as a storyline).

The second act, in particular, takes liberties with the audience’s good nature. Working class Catholic wakes might well have a tendency to burst into song, but can’t this device accomplish more than eating up stage time with a few comic dances and screechy, off-key notes? Where the script does give a payoff for what it sets up, as in the long-awaited punchline to the tale of daughter Lisa’s christening, we get school playground naughtiness rather than genuine comic inventiveness. Oh, and don’t hold your breath over the contents of Rocky’s last letter, either; *Laughter in Paradise*, this isn’t.

Lindzi Germain (as the newly-widowed Maggie) and Mickey Finn (her curmudgeonly father, Archie) are old school, anarchic, full-blooded performers of the type who need a firm-handed director to rein them in and give their talents focus. It would be interesting to see how they would face up to the challenge of a script that really required them to act. They might rise to that challenge impressively... but who knows?

*Bon Voyage* takes few prisoners of the politically correct type; the dialogue, it might be argued, is unapologetically true to type (e.g. Bumper describes Dazzler’s attempts to seduce their dead

friend's widow as trying to 'knock a slice off his tart.')

To be fair, had Father Finn's (Richie Grice) mis-speaking of the Vatican diktat 'to get down with the kids' as 'to go down on the kids' come from the stand-up set of Frankie Boyle, no doubt many a university graduate would guffaw guiltily. Context is all, I suppose. In any case, the message is that this is not an evening for the faint-hearted, the prudish or the right-on.

Bawdy working class comedies can be brilliant, outrageously hilarious and moving (witness Lee Hall's *Cooking with Elvis*), but it takes writers of ambition and skill. What *Bon Voyage* offers is more Ernie-Wise-meets-clubland-comic in *The Play Wot I Effin' Wrote*. What can't be denied on tonight's evidence is that, for some, this works.

"Don't forget to laugh, everybody!"

**Reviewer:** [Martin Thomasson](#)