

British Theatre Guide

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The Boy on the Swing

Joe Harbot
Arcola Theatre
(2011)

If God's time was a commodity to be bought and sold what sort of company would represent him? What would his corporate mission statement be and how would he find clients? More importantly, how would they convince people he really was God?

The foundation of religion is belief and is what *The Boy on the Swing* so successfully investigates, throwing the hapless Earl (Michael Shelford) into one bizarre situation after another, testing perception and expectation. With dialogue reminiscent of Pinter's circular conversations and behaviour that wouldn't be out of place on television's *Green Wing*, this intelligent comedy continually catches its audience, and main character, by surprise.

When Earl finds a discarded business card that offers to answer questions about the meaning of his existence, he dials the number out of curiosity and is soon giving his credit card number to the 'Hope and Trust Foundation' who promise to give him an audience with God. They cannot confirm or deny that the being is God but the tests they have run prove that he probably is. (And by God they mean the Western vision of an old man and not an exotic deity - just in case Earl was confused!)

With suits, form filling and an officious receptionist (beautifully paced by Nick Blood), the 'Hope and Trust' offices seem overly normal but sinister undertones prevail and the contrasting personalities of William Hope (Will Barton) and Donald Trust (Peter Bourke) do little to ease Earl's growing confusion and bemusement.

Fred Pearson enchantingly plays the Old Man (or God?) savouring each and every word. His reveal after the interval sitting contentedly on a plastic chair is comic, although the play would have worked just as well without the break in the flow.

Staged in the thrust and with a clever but minimal set there is much emphasis in this production upon the language of business and religion, although it also features a healthy dollop of physical humour. This is a quirky piece which has been excellently cast and skilfully directed and I very much hope it goes on to have a life beyond this short run.

Until 9th April

Reviewer: [Amy Yorston](#)