

British Theatre Guide

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Compression

Joy Wilkinson

Brockley Jack Studio Theatre

(2010)

Compression is the opening piece in the Brockley Jack's new writing season, [Write Now](#), and is one of three plays selected from over fifty submissions by writers with a connection to south London.

The action is played out in the bedsit of Robin Heyhoe who lives in a self-imposed exile from society. He is an outsider, carrying the baggage of hearing voices in his head from childhood, and an upbringing marred by his father's inability to cope and his mother propping herself up with anti-depressants. Tormented by bullying at school, he finds solace in the arms of troubled classmate Clare Jones for whom he still carries a torch nearly twenty years later.

Robin's life revolves around his laptop. He makes a livable income selling on ebay, his only human contact is the banging on the wall from the neighbouring room and fleeting visits from restaurant delivery drivers or callers who collect parcels. An out-of-the-blue e-mail from Clare Jones provides a focus for his life and sets him on a different path.

This one act play comes from the pen of local writer and Verity Bargate Award winner Joy Wilkinson whose work includes *Now Is the Time*, part of the Tricycle's *The Great Game*. In an interview in *The Times* last year she said, "When I go to the theatre, I want to leave knowing things I didn't know before. Something about the world in which we live, about different ways of life." In this twenty-first century love story she provides an opportunity for the audience to do just that.

The world Robin Heyhoe inhabits is a place we recognise as being an extreme version of the actual or figurative space which we ourselves go to for respite from the tough stuff of life. The difference between us and Robin is choice; his redemption is ultimately the same as ours, even if the catalyst for it occurs by destiny rather than by design.

Robin Heyhoe's bedsit is created by Nicola Eve Dobrowolski's quirky set design that hints at a padded cell and director Jennifer Lunn has Robin occasionally prowling around it, similarly suggesting the threshold of instability. Lunn's work directing the one-man *Borderline* last year has served her well since she has an excellent feel for pacing and the changes of mood within the play keeping our attention on the action throughout.

Gareth Kennerley is Robin Heyhoe; he is word-perfect for 85 minutes and completely arresting. It is not often we see a performance of this thought and conviction in a week-long fringe run and his performance alone makes this production worthy of another airing. He makes Heyhoe endearing and genuine, vulnerable without being stupid.

Compression's thoughtfulness is understated and it remains a credible piece even though there are a few moments that verge on the contrived or are unclear. It is without doubt a remarkably good

start to the Brockley Jack's debut new writing season and insofar as it can be a harbinger of what follows, it promises more good things.

The Write Now season continues until Saturday 6 March: "Fighting" by Tom Green runs Tuesday 23 to Saturday 27 February and "The Bitch from Brixton" by Kate Gallon and Kate-Lynn Hocking runs Tuesday 2 to Saturday 6 March at 7.45pm. Both shows suitable for over 16s only.

Reviewer: [Sandra Giorgetti](#)