

# British Theatre Guide

News, reviews, features and podcast on theatre across the UK

## International Playwriting Festival 2010

Warehouse Theatre, Croydon  
(2010)

This is the twenty-fourth of these annual festivals in which new plays, chosen from entries submitted from all over the world, are given readings or semi-stagings in one weekend. This year samples ten new plays from England, Scotland, Cyprus, Australia, the Warehouse's own Writers Workshop and the winner from the BRIT School's *Strawberry Picking* season last July.

I couldn't see all of them and missed two plays from the Writer's Workshop: Abigail Jackson's *Mother 2.0*, a futuristic piece about a robot programmed to look after the elderly and mentally ill, and Mike Carter's *The Trunk*, a comedy built around a man who is so disappointed finds life that he attempts suicide by locking himself in a trunk. I also missed what sounds like in interesting play about famed photographer and war correspondent Lee Miller: *Tarbaby* by Roy Chatfield.

The Warehouse works closely with companies in Italy and Cyprus to bring discoveries in Italian and Greek new writing to Britain. This year Teatro Ena from Nicosia brought two plays. *A Bar Called Lost Paradise* by Eroula Pericleous Papadopoulou is an intriguing piece that appears to present two brothers who have both loved the same woman - but are the siblings two? and of the people he meets in this burned-out bar which of them are real? It's a play about coming to terms with the past with a strong theatricality brought out effectively in an extract directed by Andreas Christodoulides.

Ena's second play, *We Three* by Paul Stewart (who also directed and played in it) was written in English and has a British setting, though one that could be transposed to any major metropolis. The relationship between old friends, philosophy lecturer John and sophisticated Zac, unpublished writer, who'd been his mentor in their student days, is tipped sideways when John returns to London with his Yorkshire artist wife. Zac is clearly jealous of John's blossoming career in academia and resents losing the influence he had over him.

Is there a homosexual element to Zac's need to dominate John? When he declares 'you get bored with looking at pictures in the National Gallery and decide to fuck your best friend's wife' should we take his suggestion that he is getting to John through Lara's body at face value? Zac tells us he is bored with the sound of his own voice and so to was I. His consciously excessively literary language may reflect his character but, in it wasn't helped by being played more like someone reading an essay than conversation. Perhaps this was a case where it didn't help for the writer to be the director but there was a very strong performance from Alexia Paraskeva as Lara.

While the extracts from *We Three* gave us a good idea of the plot, the succession of brief scenes from the opening of *DA* by Edwin Preece gave little sense of the storyline but did offer some quickly established characters: a young couple besotted with each other, a rather sinister priest, and a young man toughening himself up. It's apparently a Romeo and Juliet love story set against two brother's attempts to avenge the murder of their father. From director Joe Fredericks's comments

introducing it, it sounds as though the opportunity of performance was used to take the script to a further stage of development rather than to just showcase it to potential producers.

Although John Bashford directed five scenes out of the nine that apparently make up *The Dream Collider* by Pearl Chandra, the BRIT School selection, they left me very unsure what it was about. It begins with the interesting idea that an experiment in Switzerland (presumably the CERN particle accelerator) may set off repercussions that result in the end of the world and how people react to that possibility. The dialogue sounds natural but it didn't exactly hold me.

*Grace and Residue* by Australian C.G. Watkins presents a group of neighbours gathered a Melbourne apartment which has been bequeathed to them all by its deceased owner, discovered six-weeks dead by one of them when he woke up drunk in the wrong flat. There's good observation of how little people know or care about those who live even in the same building, though some of this group know each other much better than they should. Only the opening scene was performed (directed by Ian MacKenzie-Thurley) but it showed every sign of developing into a manic comedy.

The two scenes presented from *Last Night* by Ruari Peoples, directed by Ted Craig, took place in the kitchen where the husbands are lurking as their wives sit through the death of their mother in a room off-stage. These blokes are neither sensitive nor bright and a tragic situation becomes hilariously funny, much of the humour coming from the physical business of pretending to be useful by preparing pots of tea and digging out biscuits for the women, here made even funnier by reading out all the stage directions. A scene from the second act took place after the funeral. These are savagely observed characters but this taster offered little more than a revue sketch with no indication of where the rest of the play takes things.

It is not impossible from a twenty or thirty-minute extract to judge a complete play but you can get a taste of a writing talent. However in the two scenes from *Lemons* by Jude Bird of the theatre's Writers' Workshop we seemed to have a complete short play, though in a production that included every word of the script they were announced as Act I Scene 1 and Act I Scene 2. Performed by Jeffery Kissoon and Allister Bain, directing themselves, for me it was the high spot of the Festival. As an idea it could not be more simple: two old fellows sitting beneath a tree, which may bear lemons, chat and reminisce. I don't know whether it was the writer's instruction to read out everything or the idea of the actors but it adds a delightful complicity to what is a gift for performers as good as these. In fact it is so carefully structured that it should still work even lesser talents. If there is more than these two scenes I hope it is all as good.

*The Festival took place 6th -7th March 2010. Entries are now being accepted for next year's Festival. Closing date is 31st July 2010 (Further information on [www.warehousetheatre.co.uk](http://www.warehousetheatre.co.uk))*

**Reviewer:** [Howard Loxton](#)