

British Theatre Guide

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Danny and the Deep Blue Sea

John Patrick Shanley

Graffiti Productions

Southwark Playhouse

(2011)

Before the Oscar, the Pulitzer and the Tony Award, John Patrick Shanley (*Moonstruck*, *Doubt*) penned this sharp black comedy about two damaged souls and their attempts to find love. Graffiti Productions' revival of the 1983 play has now come to the cavernous new space at Southwark Playhouse, aptly named The Vault.

Bare brick walls, stone flooring and makeshift terraces create a suitably atmospheric setting for a play based in a gritty, rundown area of New York's Bronx. As the lights come up, we find ourselves in a what we assume is a grotty downtown bar, where two lone figures - Roberta (Clare Latham) and Danny (Jonathan Chambers) - are hiding away from the world.

Roberta has a divorce and a teenage son under her belt, Danny is a fight-bloodied trucker nicknamed The Beast. Both are lonely. Both are angry. Both are looking into the bottom of their glass for signs of life.

After a few false starts and aggressive exchanges, the pair are drawn together by a shared desire for normality. Their expectations are low - it's not excitement, glamour or exotic riches they're after - all they want is a taste of happiness, an escape from themselves and the darkness within.

"I don't get it," says a strung-out Danny. "You don't make me mad... Everybody makes me mad." But by the time the sun goes down, the pair have locked horns, ideals and eventually lips in a poignant, funny and strangely uplifting tale of sex, violence and language that would make your mother swoon.

Performed in the round with a minimal set of two simple bar stools, Ché Walker's direction makes impressive use of the space, with the characters moving naturally around the stage to allow a clear view from all sides.

Of particular note is the lighting design by Arnim Friess (whose previous work includes productions with the RSC and Birmingham Rep), which is simple but incredibly effective - perfectly evoking the gloomy fluorescents of the late-night bar scene as well as the natural lighting back at Roberta's apartment.

But, without doubt, what really captivates here is the performances. Completely owning the stage for near 90 minutes, the pair embody their characters so confidently there's never a dull or awkward moment - even when they strip down to their underwear for the majority of the second act.

While the physicality of Chambers' performance is incredibly strong, Danny's New York drawl occasionally slips into his native Jamaican, but Latham's is spot on and comes complete with the

gestures and intonation typical of the east-coast locale. From the indignant head rolls to the Italian-style hand gestures, it's almost impossible to tear your eyes away from every move this exciting young actress makes.

Injecting endless attitude into the clever, quick-fire script, the pair equally squeeze every last laugh and heart-wrenching moment out of what is otherwise a dark, disturbing story of two rejects defeating themselves with their own destructive behaviour.

A feisty production destined to reel in an equally feisty young crowd, *Danny And The Deep Blue Sea* is a bright example of how stripping a production back to high-quality basics can create truly riveting theatre.

"Danny And The Deep Blue Sea" plays until 19 November

Reviewer: [Kat Halstead](#)