

# British Theatre Guide

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## The Fat Girl Gets a Haircut and Other Stories

Mark Storer, Laurie Briggs, Alexis Burke, Jacob Crossley, Kadeem Deane, Rory Edmonds, Rosie Evans-Hill, Ashleigh Monagle, Yasmin Rackal, Miran Salman, Ishbel Tunnadine and Dharshinee Vogel

Roundhouse Main Space

(2011)

Since October 2009 eleven young people have been meeting once a week to create a piece of theatre with the help of artist Mark Storer. Answering the Roundhouse's call for young actors aged 12-15, these talented eleven have come up with a fascinating 90 minutes in which they explore not only what it means to grow up, but also what it means to devise a piece of theatre.

*The Fat Girl Gets a Haircut and Other Stories* is a series of short biographical vignettes in which the young performers tackle issues surrounding the transition from child to teen and finally adult. Bullying, angst, freedom, lust and love all feature and are depicted through a variety of theatrical techniques, which the eleven must have had great fun exploring during the devising process.

Tomato ketchup is squirted in abundance at one ensemble member stripped to his underwear, his fellow actor plunges himself into a vat of water whilst covered in paper and everyone gets rather excited at the prospect of covering a third member in shaving foam from top to bottom.

Aspects of the performance share much in common with Ghent based youth ensemble Ontroerend Goed, particularly the messy play and partial nudity, but what sets this production apart from its Belgian counterpart is that as such a variety of theatrical techniques are utilised the production becomes a rich and meaningful sensory experience.

Babis Alexiadis' projected animation is a wonder to behold as birds flutter in between the Roundhouse's internal archways and suddenly a female student's crush is revealed in all his glory. Ships set sail across the ocean and a portly pig slowly trots around the arena, all rendered in beautiful illustration and accompanied by a glorious soundtrack.

Music is integral to the performance art-style piece and underscores almost every minute of this hour and a half spectacle. From jazz to jive, boogie-woogie to ballad, so many musical genres are referenced that at times *The Fat Girl Gets a Haircut*...feels almost like a concert. But this is most certainly not to the show's detriment as the music conjures up a great sense of atmosphere and emotion that could never be achieved with words alone.

Symbolism and metaphors abound: caged birds represent oppression, soaring birds freedom, mirrors are used to depict young people's obsession with image and when the final performer commands her contemporaries to make a paper daffodil having provided them with the necessary materials, they are left to their own devices - mirroring the path to adulthood. No two papercraft daffodils are the same and in their myriad of sizes and shapes they celebrate the diversity of life.

Some vignettes are a little slow and a few suffer from blocking issues when ensemble members are seated around the stage's periphery. The production also dwells a little too much on emotional turmoil, rather than celebrating those wild teenage years of rebellion and having fun. The company obviously have very personal reasons for sharing these particular stories, and although we may never be able to fully appreciate all of the piece's symbolism due to its highly autobiographical nature, this only helps emphasise the point that puberty can be a confusing and frustrating period in one's life.

Full of tender stories and exquisite storytelling, *The Fat Girl Gets a Haircut and Other Stories* provides its audience with a fascinating insight into what it means to be growing up in Britain today.

*Playing until 7th May 2011*

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**Reviewer:** [Simon Sladen](#)