

# British Theatre Guide

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

## Fiction

Conceived by Glen Neath and David Rosenberg

Fuel

Northern Stage 3

15 February 2017

This is not like most theatre. There's no stage for a start, we see no actors, no set, costume or anything else. We see nothing. We are immersed in total blackness throughout. How is a poor critic expected to take notes?

Nor is there much plot. As the minimal online publicity puts it (there is no programme), we are on "an anxiously intimate disorientating journey through the crawling architecture of dreams". Nice phrase that, "the crawling architecture of dreams."

*Fiction* is written by Glen Neath and directed by David Rosenberg. It lasts approximately one hour and the final image before we are plunged into the blackness is the words flashed on a screen: "This is Your Last Opportunity to Leave".

At ten quid a ticket, none of us did, though there is that same sense of nervous anticipation as you get when clamped into your seat on the roller-coaster. We all wear headphones and the hyper-realistic binaural sound is so startling I swear I could feel breath on my neck as a seductive female whisperer told me I may fall asleep and that I was to be given a chaperone.

To summarise what happens serves little purpose, except to say we often appear to be in a featureless modern hotel. There is a surrealist edge and what dialogue there is focuses on small detail in that telling, somewhat menacing way of a Pinter script where everyone seems alienated from everyone else. The stereo is often used to startling effect. First one ear, then the next.

*Fiction* has the capacity to immerse us, to suck us into its own strange world. Logic tells us we are in no danger, yet logic at times has to take a back seat as the aural imagination takes over. Noises are strange and often not identifiable. The growing disturbing noise at the climax made me want to flee, except I had little idea how to get out.

In life, we rarely experience total blackness—not we urbanites anyway. Plus which, in a society constantly bombarded with visual imagery by advertisers and other propagandists, seldom is our instinctive and intellectual response generated through sound alone. Even when listening to radio plays, some extraneous noises usually intrude: doorbells, mobiles, street sounds, boiling kettles, barking dogs, etc.

Many noises here are minimal but not easily named: small scratchings, scrapings, objects dragged along. Yet we know or suspect some large hostile sound may soon follow.

Basically, *Fiction* unnerves us because we feel we have handed over control. And we humans, hard-wired to feel in charge of the universe, aren't quite sure about that. Yet the packed audiences the show is attracting suggest it is also something that intrigues us.

Fuel is one of those rare companies that rewrites the rules. Which is what the best art is about. When it suddenly ends and the lights snap back on, we are jolted back to the other, more familiar universe.

**Reviewer:** [Peter Mortimer](#)