

British Theatre Guide

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Firestarter

Dave Windass

Ensemble 52

Three Minute Theatre (24:7 Theatre Festival)

20–26 July 2012

While for some of us the title of this play conjures up images of "Keef" from The Prodigy with his green-horned hair, writer Dave Windass is using the word literally as it is simply about someone who starts fires.

The first section, handily subtitled "Part 1" using a held-up sign, is a monologue from Peter, the firestarter of the title, talking about how he started lighting fires and what he likes about it. When his fingers start to tingle, he has to obey them and light a fire, and it doesn't matter to him whether anyone gets hurt or killed.

"Part 2" changes gear completely, taking us into the house of Annie and Tone, the latter having just "got out", but he has suspicions about whether Annie was faithful to him while he was inside. During this exchange across the breakfast table, Peter is sat tied to a chair with a bag over his head—he has picked the wrong house to wander into on his latest pyrotechnical spree.

There is a good idea at the heart of this play and there are elements of it that realise this idea very effectively, but there is a lot of padding holding it all up. In fact the whole of part 1 could be excised quite easily as there is nothing in that section that the audience needs to know that doesn't come out in part 2. Getting rid of this would remove a very static opening and cut straight to the real action.

There are other odd little diversions that have no purpose apart from trying to make the characters a little quirky, like when Tone suddenly decides to play charades. Why doesn't he just get on and do what he has said he is going to do? These little diversions are not sufficiently justified and come across as writerly conceits.

The best moments are when the atmosphere in that kitchen becomes so tense that you can feel it out in the auditorium, when you don't know whether Tone is going to suddenly erupt into violence, nor whom his target will be. While the title and the opening direct us to Peter as the main character, the more interesting heart of the play is the relationship between Annie and Tone and how they react to having this stranger in their midst. A change of focus could throw a whole new light on the play.

Under Andrew Pearson's usual tight direction for Ensemble 52, there are strong performances from Andy Wilson as stuttering Peter who can't even look the audience in the eye, Zoe Matthews as incessantly chattering Annie with the volume knob stuck on full and Richard Vergette surprisingly effective as the volatile hard man Tone.

Reviewer: [David Chadderton](#)