

British Theatre Guide

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Five Kinds of Silence

Shelagh Stephenson

KC productions

Etcetera Theatre

5–9 September 2017

Five Kinds of Silence is a grim play.

It opens with the shooting dead of Billy (Kevin G Cormack) by his daughters Janet (Charlotte Campbell) and Susan (Suzanne Celensu).

Like a tragic chorus, the family including Billy then spend the rest of the play detailing a history of violence and abuse that led to the killing.

Billy, who is described by his daughter as that “blighted wild eyed man”, beats and sleeps with his daughters and wife Mary (Moya Allen). One of them says that “he is turning us into ghosts.”

As a child, he was abused by his parents and in response became obsessed with control, citing a reassuring childhood visit to what he perceived as the regimented security of a barracks.

Mary also was abused by her father.

They tell their stories mostly in monologue directly to the audience. Occasionally, what they say is in response to things said by the very vaguely sketched characters of police, legal defender and doctor.

There are no surprises, only the intensely poetic revelation of doomed families passing on their brutality from one generation to the next.

This production uses a minimal set of a series of hard-backed chairs and a small table upon which sits the whisky so loved by Billy. The actors give a clear, engaging performance though at times the pacing feels slower than you would expect.

Shelagh Stephenson’s play is a bleak vision of a world in which society no longer supports people. Instead they are left to the precarious private security of the family where terrible things sometimes happen.

One of Billy’s daughters explains, “we slipped into another world where nobody spoke... But they know, they saw. All that silence. Five kinds of silence. Each of ours and the outside world... We slipped through it like ghosts.”

Reviewer: [Keith Mckenna](#)