

# British Theatre Guide

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

## Foam

Harry McDonald

Croft & Dye Productions and Salt Lick Productions

Finborough Theatre, London

19 March–13 April 2024

Nicky Crane was one of those young white lads in the 1970s who were attracted to skinhead culture and neo-Nazi politics.

Joining the British Movement (BM) and becoming their Kent organiser, he was notorious for his tough appearance and physical attacks on ethnic minorities, some of which landed him in prison. However, Nicky had for many years a secret that wouldn't have fitted too well with the intolerant prejudices of those he organised alongside. He was gay.

Harry McDonald's play *Foam*, directed by Matthew Iliffe, lets us glimpse five imagined moments from his bleak and disturbing life, taking us from his recruitment at age fifteen by a leading figure in the BM to his final days in a hospital dying of AIDS.

Each scene plays out in tight, believable dialogue set in an impressively white-tiled public toilet designed by Nitin Parmar. The characters he encounters illustrate his contradictory experience rather than being a realistic portrayal of any personality.

Thus the show opens with Nicky aged fifteen, alone at a sink in the toilet shaving his head, when an aristocratic black-shirted figure arrives introducing himself as Mosley (Matthew Baldwin) which implies he is the Mosley that led the British Fascists of the 1930s.

He points Nicky (Jake Richards) in the direction of a "club" that would suit his tough appearance and gives him a pair of Dr. Martin boots to wear, which he then takes great pleasure in licking and effectively reminding us of the "homoerotic" aspects of fascist culture.

The following scene takes us to sometime later when a more settled Nicky, popular with his skinhead followers, is performing at a venue where he gets "camera boy" Gabriel (Kishore Walker) whom he fancies to follow him into the toilet. Confident that he can take risks with his double life, he doesn't make much effort to disguise his interest.

That includes getting work as a security guard at gay venues where we see him being confronted by Bird (Adolphus Johnson), a black anti-fascist who recognises him from one of Nicky's brutal attacks. He even takes part in gay porn videos and is surprised that Chris (Kishore Walker), another actor, admits to wanting to "fuck" him but refuses to go for a drink with him pointing to the Nazi tattoos.

The incompatibility of his gay life with the brutality and anti-gay prejudices of the far right does eventually lead to his claim to have broken with the neo-Nazi groups of his youth, and a final scene shows him hospitalised and being cared for by his partner, Craig (Matthew Baldwin), and a black nurse who wheels him from the stage.

The well-performed show follows the key elements of the real Nicky Crane's political life in an interesting sequence that humanises a terrifying figure without celebrating his supposed charisma or endorsing any of the appalling things he did.

Although the play doesn't give us any idea of why he embraced a political force that would probably have carted him off to prison if they came to power, Nicky's words suggest he joined before he was quite aware of his sexual preference.

The trouble is, he continued with them for some time after he recognised their incompatibility with his own beliefs. That shocking complicity is revealed in his attempt to excuse his membership by saying he "never went queer-bashing. Never let it happen in front of me either."

Given the current growth in the far right across Europe, theatre should follow the example of Harry McDonald and help us understand and resist this potentially lethal threat to society and everything we care about.

**Reviewer:** [Keith Mckenna](#)