

# British Theatre Guide

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

## Gastronauts

Created by April De Angelis, Nessah Muthy and Wils Wilson

Royal Court Theatre

21 November–21 December 2013

Described by the theatre as “a theatre adventure with food and music”, this is a straight-through one-hour-forty-minute show in the form of a “dining experience” that takes a look at gastronomy, dieting, food supply, food as merchandise and global hunger.

To underline part of its message, diners (audience that is) are asked to bring an item of non-perishable food to the performance, which is then donated to the Lambeth Food Bank run by the The Trussel Trust, a charity that partners with churches and communities to open food banks nationwide.

Gathering in the lobby of the Gastronauts restaurant, diners are invited by a glittering tiger’s head to help themselves to a drink from the shot glasses lined up for them, a surreal beginning to their adventure offering a curious but unidentifiable taste that is a harbinger of what’s to come.

To emphasise the “journey of the senses” that participants are taking, the “restaurant” has staff in uniforms reminiscent of airline cabin crew, complete with their own semaphore-like safety routine, and a peak-capped, heavily moustachioed guy who calls himself the Captain (Alasdair Macrea who, as musical director, is also composer and performer of the show’s music).

What’s happening on another table in a restaurant can sometimes prove more interesting than the conversation at your own and, when Andy Clark, Imogen Doel, Nathaniel Martello-White and Justine Mitchell aren’t tending tables and serving food, they slip off their uniforms to become other diners to play out short scenes that are a cleverly calculated mix of personal story and critical comment on our attitudes to food and how we obtain it.

The meal begins with a plastic beaker of soup (delicious), that tastes, as Andy Clark tells us, just like his Scottish granny made it. That is followed by an airline plastic tray that offers a range of Heston Blumenthal style deceptively disguised taster dishes to be sampled in synchronised eating under the Captain’s instructions. Cows serve exotic protein alternatives to beef and then, as hungry hordes begin to gather outside, the lights go out, though service of a kind continues.

Meanwhile, there has been a chance to eavesdrop on a marketing adviser and predictor of future trends getting a contract with a US food manufacturer, a gay guy on a blind date earning an investment opportunity with a sexual favour and other little episodes that raise issues from over-dieting (with surreal shrinkage) to cattle methane production, BOGOF marketing to exploitation of primary producers.

While cocking a snook at pretentious dining and offering lots of food facts and figures along the way, this is a relatively light-hearted look at a coming food crisis that is livened up with musical items and occasional surrealism—a horse, for instance, wondering why humans don’t graze like he does and eat even when they aren’t actually hungry.

It doesn't raise issues or provide information that any politically aware person would not probably know already, but its immersive format, its humour and the energy of its performers make it entertaining and it may encourage some SW3 diners to think before they eat in future.

*Gastronauts* serves good wine from Berry Brothers but, unless you are very strictly dieting, its minimal gourmet catering will leave you hungry—but the ticket is for a show not for a meal and that's what you get.

**Reviewer:** [Howard Loxton](#)