

British Theatre Guide

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Guru of Touch: A Zoom Play

Jenny Lyn Bader

Flying Solo! & This Is Not A Theatre Company

Online@theSpaceUK

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Hate to sound like I'm picking favourites but, so far, Flying Solo! and This Is Not A Theatre Company have produced the most enjoyable shows for Online@theSpaceUK. *Guru of Touch: A Zoom Play* continues the trend.

James Kiberd plays the Guru of Touch, a charismatic faith healer capable of restoring health just by the power of touch. The onset of the coronavirus pandemic and social distancing has effectively put the Guru out of business but rather than offer refunds he decides to test his powers by holding healing sessions over the Internet. This creates challenges—the Guru's lack of confidence in using the technology is making him doubt the extent of his powers. The 'herd mentality'—which ensures people in a live healing event will go along with the majority even if they do not believe—is absent so some clients are expressing doubt. There is also an unexpected anonymous guest watching.

Lyn Bader's script is full of surprises—initially unpleasant characters develop gradually to the extent all of them end up showing aspects of themselves that are likeable. The play opens as an apparently world-weary look at a cynical enterprise. Early in the play, Bader sums up why faith healing offers such rich pickings for predators—if the process works, customers will accept the outcome. If it does not work but the clients believe it has then it might as well have done so. The effect is the same and, in any case, the Guru gets the credit. Yet the play moves on to uncover unexpected romantic and optimistic aspects. Perhaps the point of the play is we should not allow reasonable scepticism to make us blind to the possibility of hope.

James Kiberd is a surprisingly vulnerable Guru—badly shaken by the break-up of his marriage and his technical shortcomings. An excellent comic sequence has Kiberd visibly distraught at learning the sound technician has used the outpourings of his innermost feelings for a soundcheck. It is this vulnerability that helps viewers overcome any scepticism about the Guru's profession and feel a degree of sympathy for the person.

An excellent cast convey their opinions on the credibility of the Guru through facial reactions—one so enthusiastic she is pushing her face to the screen, another so uninterested she is eating crisps. Director Erin B Mee makes great use of the technology to demonstrate the changing opinions of the clients. With the cast filmed in split screen, as in a Zoom conference call, it is possible to note how one character reacts to another and trace their growing realisation there might be more happening than they had expected.

Guru of Touch: A Zoom Play is a charming play with an excellent script and great performances. Go on—join the healing circle.

Reviewer: [David Cunningham](#)