

# British Theatre Guide

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## Hand-Me-Down

Written and performed by Kate Craddock  
The Empty Space and Kate Craddock  
Tristan Bates Theatre  
(2011)

Every object has a story to tell. And in charity shops, filled with the lost, forgotten and once loved, this is doubly so. *Hand-Me-Down* starts out as just trying to bring to life some of the stories and people that are part of a charity shop: those who shop there, those who give, those who work there.

But more than just putting on stage a catalogue of different people linked together by one institution, the Charity Shop, *Hand-Me-Down* uses charity shops as a little composite image to explore Charity generally, in a suitably jumbled and surprising way.

The play opens with a packed set: two hangers filled with clothes and boxes all over the place. We meet a volunteer working in the shop who gives us a little tour, showing the ins and outs and little things of her world.

But very quickly we're moving away from the charity shop itself to families who give to charity, to people who give their time to Africa or to Comic Relief.

This is a bit confusing and you need to take a few steps back to see where this girl volunteering in Africa fits in with a small town charity shop.

Yet it all does fit in a bit of a ramshackle, lopsided way, and the characters are intriguing and distinct enough that almost all of them glint onto the stage, playing with the setting and the props, drawing out the curiosities along with the audience's curiosity. The individual characters are memorable and interesting, each with their own little foibles and, cleverly, much more is hinted at than is shown so that you see but never grasp what's on stage.

In fact, that the play is loosely stitched together fits not only charity shops themselves but the bulging and overwhelming idea of Charity itself.

This sensory overload is in fact the best part of the play, where you give up trying to make everything fit neatly and start enjoying the small bits for themselves, while remaining away of the bigger picture.

As this is a one-woman show, a lot rests on Kate Craddock's shoulders and she is more than up to the task: flipping back and forth seamlessly and charmingly from immigrant trying to cut costs to overly proud charity shop volunteer.

Craddock herself seems fascinated by each of these objects and characters and this comes across with a certain edge of wonder to everything she touches. There's a real playfulness with the set and which each of the roles.

This said there is one weak character: an up and coming media person using her time in Africa as a way to gain transferable skills and build up her career. While this part made sense as a way to draw out how overseas aid is seedily used and abused by the media, the actual character itself was a bit of a weak stereotype, too easily drawn to be relatable or interesting, and given too much stage time.

The other major part of this play is the imaginative set itself: ostensensibly just two hangers filled with clothes and a dressing screen, all of this is unpacked and repacked with new objects coming apparently out of nowhere. For example, the hangers when put side to side make up a rainbow of clothes.

*Hand-Me-Down* is a playful, engaging and brilliantly jumbled night, stitched together with clever touches, warm acting and an aggressive awareness that charity is far from a simple matter. It makes for an engaging and nicely boundary pushing night.

*"Hand-Me-Down" is playing at the Tristan Bates Theatre until 2nd July*

**Reviewer:** [Tobias Chapple](#)