

# British Theatre Guide

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

## The Ho-Ho Club

Roy Smiles  
King's Head Theatre  
(2006)

*The Ho-Ho Club* may be a microcosm of the life behind the scene of stand-up comedians. If it is, then, there no glamour and very little humour in that existence.

Roy Smiles, a confessed 'failed stand-up comedian', through humour and wit, shares some of the pains of humiliation and momentary joys in the unenviable life he experienced. Smiles is also one of the seven protagonists in this play. He is the fatherly figure in the ruthless small world of entertainment.

Life is tough when your professional survival hinges on the amount of air you can extract from the audience's lungs with your words, pauses and mime within a limited space and time. Stand-up comedians bloom but wilt as soon as the audience refuse to be amused.

Dave Harper (Roger Kitter), the Ho-Ho Club owner, knows too well the screws required to secure a successful comedy club. Sex and clichéd political jokes are bound to extract some laughter. He is aware that the comedy club audience is hungry for dirty sex jokes mingled with tabloid humour. Ever savvy, he feeds them with just that. He takes the spot-light to link between the acts. A large cigar adds to the macho's figure paraded. Ruthless, he cares little for anyone but the club's 'golden egg' in the form of Linda Walsh, performed by Sally Lindsay.

Lindsay appears on the scene dressed very casually and gradually transforms, in front of the dowdy dressing-room table, into the public face loved by the club's fans. In the course of that transformation we are privy to her flirtation with the deliciously narcissistic fellow comedian Tony Watts (Stephen Dean), her marriage breakdown and a glimpse into the grinding process that take place before the show begins.

The 'extra slot' of the evening performance of the Ho-Ho Club is offered to the young inexperienced Debbie Thomas, performed by the very talented Katy-Jo Howman. Debbie Thomas represents the thousands of youngsters failed attempts to prove they have the X-Factor.

Howman's 'failed gig' was moving to a point when you momentarily forgot she was acting the part and felt for her. The applause that followed the scene clearly reflects that she had that impact on all.

There is something obsolescent about the theme of the play. However, Karl Howman's direction together with Smiles' excellent punch lines and overall good performance by all members of the cast remind us that the made-up faces we see on stage, even in a short gig, are the result of a complex and often painfully arduous journey.

*Runs until 5th November*

Reviewer: [Rivka Jacobson](#)