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Jamais Vu [Brexit means Brexit]

James Ellis

Weeping Tudor Productions

Preseli Room, Wales Millennium Centre

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Often, on leaving a production of an experimentally-inflected performance piece, one is left wondering “what the hell was that all about?” There is no risk of that with *Jamais Vu*—this is an unambiguous howl of anger at the UK’s decision to leave the European Union.

The most high-profile response to this political earthquake, the National Theatre’s touring [My Country...](#), developed by “listening” to the public, utilises the techniques of verbatim theatre to paint a scrupulously even-handed picture of the state of a divided nation, which makes for a stimulating but frustrating evening. *Jamais Vu*, on the other hand, makes no pretence of objectivity.

I attended a showing at a relatively early stage of development, taking place before a small audience in a function room at Cardiff’s Millennium Centre, when, ironically, all around, the Bay area in which it is situated was preparing for a glittering twin Champions’ League celebration of European sporting excellence.

Described as “a deviation of sound for two performers and sound designer”, *Jamais Vu* commences with female performer Tabitha Sue Fry taunting her male counterpart, author James Ellis, with a red rag, as though teasing a bull. What follows is a sequence of songs, recitations, dance and dialogues all reflecting the fractious tone of the continuing debate over the Brexit decision.

The show is carefully structured while intentionally (I assume) shambolic in tone; while modernist composers are invoked, the singing isn’t quite operatic, and the movement is fairly basic. As well as being the progenitor of the piece, Ellis also provides some basic guitar, more accomplished keyboard-playing, and a cathartic interlude on home-made percussion.

Fry is equally committed, not shrinking from making eye-contact with the sparse audience, and giving her all in the screaming argument during which the couple repetitively accuse one another of voting for Brexit.

The piece is knitted together by the clever live sound design of young composer Joe Shrimpling, which alternates sampled monologues with intense electronica, to entertainingly deranged effect.

In terms of textual content, *Jamais Vu* does seem a tad one-dimensional. While one would not expect a balanced debate in this context, the “leave” argument is represented only by a bout of flag-waving; some more dissenting voices might have been welcome, if only to provide a greater degree of satirical focus.

A work in progress, then, and a bold statement, providing much to chew upon in a little over half an hour. One fully expects that future incarnations of *Jamais Vu* will build on those strengths which are already in evidence.

Reviewer: [Othniel Smith](#)