

# British Theatre Guide

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## JB Shorts 7

Lindsay Williams, Jane McNulty, Chris Thompson, Peter Kerry, Bill Taylor and Dave Simpson  
Reallife Theatre Company  
Joshua Brooks, Manchester  
20–31 March 2012

Reallife Theatre's acclaimed *JB Shorts* events at Joshua Brooks pub in Manchester is now in its seventh incarnation with another six brand new, fifteen-minute plays by television writers, many of whom are fairly new to writing for stage and featuring a few faces that are known "off the telly".

It is a testament to the reputation and quality of these events that they are able to pack out a dingy pub cellar on the outskirts of Manchester's city centre on a Tuesday night with an audience that is largely young but overall quite mixed in age, although the promise of a few TV stars on the bill has got to help a bit too.

The opening piece is *Pop* by regular *Shorts* writer Lindsay Williams, directed by Miranda Parker. The play takes place in a field in the aftermath of a pop festival as young couple Cal (Daniel Wallace) and Niamh (Christine Clare) emerge from their tent, hung over, followed by Niamh's sister Sophie (Esther Shelmerdine) and the gormless Johnny (Christian Foster) whom she is rather embarrassed to have ended up with the night before. The scene mostly hinges around whether they can fold their tent back up again or the morality of leaving it in the field for someone else to clear away, but although it touches on or mentions lots of things from low-paid Chinese factory workers to Cal going to fight in Afghanistan, it isn't really focussed enough to say anything substantial about anything and it does become a bit repetitive at times. However many of the funny moments work well.

For Jane McNulty's *Sit, Stay, Roll Over*, directed by James Blakey, the three actors play dogs who have been sent to the pound: Tyson (Peter Ash) is an illegal pit bull terrier whose owner has been arrested; Geoff (John Henshaw) is a family pet, a mongrel, whose family can no longer afford to keep him; and Peaches Fairy Paws (Tigga Goulding) was the pampered pooch of the daughter of a hotel chain magnate who believes she is there by mistake and that her agent will whisk her away for a starring role at any moment—plus a brief appearance from Daniel Wallace as a pup at the end. There is lots of fun to be had with humans taking on animal mannerisms and subtly drawing parallels between their situation and similar situations in the human world, such as middle-aged workers struggling to find another job—but it draws to a rather dark conclusion.

*Match of the Day* is a duologue from writer Chris Thompson directed by Monkeywood Theatre's Martin Gibbons featuring David Judge as top class footballer Rob towards the end of his career being tested for fitness after an injury by new physiotherapist Kate (Sarah Jayne Dunn). Rob at first objects to having a woman physiotherapist, but then Kate proves she is able to give as good as she gets with some cutting remarks about his life and career. There is another very dark ending that brings a touch of melodrama, but it is a polished and entertaining piece that really draws you in to the banter between these well-drawn characters.

Following the interval, Peter Kerry's *Quickfire*, directed by Trevor MacFarlane, has an original approach to narration by casting main character Colin Townsend (Alex Woodhall) as a leading stand-up comedian on an arena tour and the audience as his audience. He talks about moving away from "what's the deal with..." observational humour into more "edgy" material in response to a critic's comment. Despite this, he recounts a real-life (so he tells us) event that happened to him in a petrol station when he is recognised as a star by the girl behind the counter (Sian Hill) and then set upon by a very boring customer (Steve Cain), which we witness as he tells it. Woodhall keeps the pace rapid with his stand-up delivery and the whole piece is lively and funny, but again with a dark ending. It seems happy endings are not in fashion at the moment, even for comedies.

Back to a two-hander for Bill Taylor's *Last Night*, directed by Hannah Tyrrell-Pinder. It would spoil the initial shock of Ellie's (Hannah Wolfe) first line to Marianne (Elianne Byrne) to give away their relationship, but the latter rescued the former from a situation involving excessive alcohol and predatory young men the night before and this has put her in a potentially damaging situation for herself. This is a great situation, beautifully played by both actresses, that shows some significant shifts of power and Marianne's desperate attempts to claw back the upper hand with a great final image of her on her own, but there are times when it stretches credibility a bit too much and where the dialogue over-explains or becomes repetitive. With a bit of editing, this could be a really powerful little piece.

Finally, *The Confession* by Dave Simpson and Diane Whitley, directed by Alice Barlett, takes another unusual approach to character narration by casting the audience as the receiver of Catholic Patrick's church confession—about how he has fathered 68 children out of wedlock. As in *Quickfire*, the scene flashes back to the events he describes, with Sandra Maitland as his wife Eileen and two of the women he impregnated, Kimberley Hart-Simpson as naïve Rose and later as Rose's daughter Trisha and Daniel Fitzsimons as Sean, the youngest of Patrick's 8 children to his wife. But with 76 of his children around the local area, something is bound to come out eventually. This is another fun piece that works well.

The whole evening is slickly-presented, from showing people to the scattered seats in the basement to the very fast turnaround of minimal set and props between performances, and at just £6 for 6 plays, it's a pretty cheap night out with enough variety to find something you like and as many stars (who can act) as you see in many productions at some of the larger Manchester theatres.

**Reviewer:** [David Chadderton](#)