

# British Theatre Guide

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

## Kin

Christine Mackie  
Best Girl Productions  
The Dukes, Lancaster  
25–28 May 2022

Some people! They're so wrapped up in their own dramas, so immersed in their own moods and emotions that, even when they think they're doing what's best for another, they're really only serving their own needs.

Poor Kay McGregor, just back from her husband Robert's funeral, and desperately needing time to rest, reflect and plan for her future alone, finds herself lumbered with a prime example of such a person—her largely-estranged sister-in-law, Steph.

Robert's widow (she pointedly calls him 'Robert') is a highly successful, self-made businesswoman. Even so, for all her bluff Bradford attitude, she can't persuade Steph (the barely grieving sister of the late 'Bob') to leave. To begin with, this is highly amusing (and no doubt sparks pangs of recognition and empathy in tonight's grown-up audience). Before long, however, we begin to suspect that the flighty, chaotic, garrulous, irritating and occasionally witty Steph has some deeper, perhaps more sinister agenda than the sharing of a little "sisterly" love.

What does Steph really want? And who is the mysterious person she secretly calls on her mobile, the one apparently heading for some prearranged rendezvous at Kay's house?

*Kin* is all about secrets—secrets Steph knows and is determined, one by one, to share with her sister-in-law, like it or not. Each new revelation seems to scoop more ground from the foundations on which Kay has built her life. What will remain for the lonely widow when the final truth is told? Could it even be that Steph is spinning a cruel web of deceit?

*Kin* is produced by an all-female team, and tonight's audience is predominantly female. One wonders when men will grow up and accept that "women's stories" are human stories—of relevance and interest to us all. (It would also be nice to see more under-50s in the theatre, but that's another dream altogether.)

Director Sue Jenkins has cast two very able women, Roberta Kerr (Kay) and Kerry Willison-Parry (Steph), in Christine Mackie's two-hander.

Willison-Parry has more fun of it, in that Steph is the more fully-drawn character: vulnerable, inadequate, exploited, immature, witty, manipulative and dripping with the expectation that privilege imbues. Willison-Parry's Steph is lovable, pitiable, despicable, perhaps even enviable in her resilience—every inch the damaged daughter of a dysfunctional upper-class family.

Kerr has a tougher time realising Kay—a character she would surely have gobbled up if only the tough, working-class girl made good were more fully present on the page. As things stand, there is too little sense of what her life has really been like, who she really is.

Writer Mackie's dramatic instincts are sound, with plenty of highly charged turning points in the plot. In the current draft, however, too many of these shifts are neither fully earned nor sufficiently developed. This leaves the actors (Kerr, in particular) having to leap across the void from high and rocky emotional states to others where the terrain is flatter and more lush. Good actors (and Kerr and Willison-Parry are good) are capable of traversing such topography but, if not bridges, the writer must at least provide climbing gear and maps. Failing that, Sherpa Jenkins might need to offer more assistance.

Even with these reservations, *Kin* has lots of clever dialogue and a fascinating tale to tell. It's well worth your time and money. Tonight's audience gives it a rousing ovation.

**Reviewer:** [Martin Thomasson](#)