

# British Theatre Guide

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

## King Hamlin

Gloria Williams

Naiad Productions & Freedom Tongues in association with Park Theatre

Park 90

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In the last but one Tory leadership race, Rishi Sunak told a gathering of ordinary Tory members in some countryside constituency that Labour had been putting money into deprived areas and that the Tories were now taking it out of those areas. An academic listening to that supposed Tory achievement wryly commented, “then they are surprised at the increase in knife crime in those areas.”

King Hamlin gives us a glimpse of that achievement. The young single mother of Hamlin referred to as Mrs King (Kiza Deen) by Hamlin’s friend Quinn had recently lost her job at the youth centre closed down by the authorities. It was a place where the kids who attended had often not eaten, their families split by poverty. She tours the city looking for work, a frustration adding to the trauma of her husband being killed while trying to stop a fight.

Her son Hamlin can’t get a job and, being only 17, isn’t old enough to claim benefits. When employers ask if he can work from home, he has to reply in the negative having no access to the Internet or a laptop. He would like to be a software engineer but “hasn’t got the tools.” He just “feels dirty to employers.”

His friend Quinn hasn’t money for even basic things and describes the worry of his younger sister who still growing, getting complaints from her school that her skirt is becoming too short. Of course, schools rarely respect a young person’s right to decide what they wear on their own bodies.

The play opens with Hamlin (Harris Cain) waking from a nightmare about a job interview failure. Quinn (Inaam Barwani) arrives to suggest they do something slightly illegal to get out of the poverty trap. It’s nothing violent you understand. (Quinn refuses to be violent even when it might save his own life.) It’s just selling some counterfeit bags and later some drugs. Yet it is likely that such activities have already led to the killing of their friend Alex.

In a desperately poor community, the competition between young lads for limited opportunities can tragically flare into conflict and violence. You know where this story is heading. Nic (Andrew Evans), the friend who feels impelled to take on the mantle of their leader after Alex’s death, becomes more monstrous by the minute, at one point telling Hamlin, “what’s the difference between sum posh twat saying give me liberty or give me death and me sayin’ I don’t give a fuck?”

It’s a confident performance, though at times you can find the dialogue is spoken a bit fast to catch its often thoughtful, believable script. The unshaded plotting also tends to deliver an overly heightened, turbocharged, melodramatic second half, but the story is a rare, thoughtful glimpse of the violence this government is creating in our cities.

**Reviewer:** [Keith Mckenna](#)