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Lobby Hero

Kenneth Lonergan
New Ambassadors
(2002)

Lobby Hero is another play from the latest American Imports season at the Donmar to transfer into the West End. At least two more might have done so if they could have kept their American casts together for long enough. This is a fine compliment to a brave but extremely successful experiment.

Lobby Hero is a comedy that explores deep moral issues. Its four characters each have to decide whether honesty or loyalty is more important to them. By the end of the play, we see that Mr. Lonergan is a very moral playwright who believes that good will out. In order to get there though, he does require considerable contrivance in his plotting.

Under the direction of Mark Brokaw, who has been with the play since its inaugural performances in New York, the actors play off each other in a series of one on one encounters. One of the director's strengths is his belief in body language which brings out character, whether nervy or swaggering.

The lobby hero himself is Jeff, played by David Tennant, who is one of life's innocents. He finds himself doing a night security job having left the Navy under a cloud after "a little bad luck", thereby disappointing his father, a true hero. Like the security guard in Gagarin Way, he knows that this is only a temporary role before his true genius emerges. Sadly, the audience and William know better.

Jeff is the kind of man who cannot keep quiet and has a nasty habit of unintentionally irritating and offending those around him. He also has the worst chat up line heard for some considerable time. In Tennant's performance there are many undertones of Woody Allen. This makes for much comedy but does not explain why almost everyone that comes into contact with Jeff wishes to confess as if to a priest.

The first communicant is his boss, William played by Gary McDonald. William's brother has committed a murder and desperately needs an alibi. Is it right to protect your innocent, black brother against the vicissitudes of a racist society when his lawyer is incompetent? Perhaps more to the point, is it still right if he may not be innocent?

While the security guards are wrestling with these issues, we are introduced to two sassy New York cops. Bill (Dominic Rowan) is both heroic and immoral. He is exactly the kind of person that a politically correct society might expect from its police force. He may be a womaniser but he is prepared to back his male friends at any risk to himself. He is also above the law. At the New Ambassadors, Dominic Rowan really excels in one hilarious speech as he persuades himself, if nobody else that he really is "Supercop" as his colleagues have dubbed him.

This becomes even clearer as we are introduced to Bill's rookie sidekick, Dawn played by Charlotte Randle. She has fallen in love with Bill and is inevitably going to be badly let down. Because she

has felt the need to assert herself while on duty, she is forced to remain in line and bite her tongue. There is thus scope for any or all of the characters to blackmail the others.

Eventually, as all of the problems circle around and come together, only one of the characters chooses right rather than popularity, even then arguably for the wrong reasons. The others cannot reach the same type of inner peace.

While the underlying issues are well thought through and many of the lines are very funny, some of the plotting is hard to take and the characters are not fully developed. Having said that, David Tennant gives a very funny, poignant performance as Jeff, Charlotte Randle is spunky as the tiny policewoman and Dominic Rowan makes the odious Bill into a comic figure. Somehow though, Lonergan works too hard to prove a point rather than letting the story play itself out. Perhaps he has too many ideas for his own good.

Reviewer: [Philip Fisher](#)