

British Theatre Guide

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MANWATCHING

Royal Court Theatre

Roundabout @ Summerhall

4–27 August 2017



MANWATCHING seems like a natural evolution of various movements in modern playwriting.

It clearly owes a debt to *The Vagina Monologues*—which is namedropped at one point during the performance—but it also falls into that quirky yet narrow category where it rubs shoulders with Tim Crouch's groundbreaking [An Oak Tree](#) and Nassim Soleimanpour's brilliantly conceived [White Rabbit, Red Rabbit](#). Although, of the two, it's the latter which seems to have been the direct draw.

Much like in Soleimanpour's play, the script of the piece is handed to someone who has never seen it before, who must then read and perform it as best they can. The gimmick of the piece is that the script was written by an anonymous woman, and concerns her experiences with men and desires for them.

However, the chosen blind performer must by necessity be a man, and a comedian rather than an actor, presumably to add a level of dissonance and add a further level to the humour through a childish awkwardness.

And it is funny; or at least it certainly can be. There is enough wit and varied jokes written into the script to allow a talented performer to draw an audience in, albeit some of it never rises above the level of giggling at a man saying "vagina". Outside of the jokes, the script meanders somewhat and the show really could be called *MASTURBATION*, considering that topic seems to take up significant amounts of the runtime.

It was comedian and novelist Mark Watson who took the stage during the evening I saw the play and his carefree and cheerfully hapless attitude really carried the piece. In fact at first, he looked somewhat concerned at the size of the sheath of papers handed to him. However once he got into the swing of things, he carried it off eloquently, with only a few moments of stop-starting or awkwardly performing a stage direction.

Ultimately, that seems to be the key to *MANWATCHING*. It requires a comedian who can carry off the show in a way that's jovial and fun and preferably in as inoffensive a manner as possible. Indeed, one can only imagine, or dream, of the way someone like Bernard Manning or Bill Hicks would have carried off the piece.

An uncharitable reading of the list of allocated performers would say that each is a relatively attractive man in his 30s or 40s, who does fairly safe comedy. Perhaps in the hands of someone more risky, the piece could be something far more interesting and boundary pushing.

As it stands, it's amusing, but ultimately a forgettable sophomoric attempt at an idea others have done better before.

Reviewer: [Graeme Strachan](#)