

British Theatre Guide

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Mouth Open, Story Jump Out

Polarbear

Battersea Arts Centre

Unicorn Theatre (Clare Theatre)

18 September–27 October 2018

Polarbear (aka Steven Camden) is a storyteller but also a playwright and *Mouth Open* is a piece of storytelling, about and specifically aimed at youngsters about ten years old, that feels like full-blown theatre.

Polarbear, surrounded by what is both the debris of previous performances and the raw materials for this one, engages his audience in conversation from the moment the first of them enters the theatre with a constant reminder for those who have only just entered that “it hasn’t started yet.” He asks how long to wait for any latecomers and (at the performance I saw) it is only when one imaginative lad imitates an alarm bell going off that he starts the show proper.

Already, everyone is a participant as he tells how, when he was ten, his dad disappeared one night; he just wasn’t there in the morning. Distracted, he forgot all about his homework, a report on a book that he should have read. When called to the front of the class to deliver it he makes up a reason: that he had to help his father who is travelling the world researching a book about being a secret agent.

It’s amazing: everyone believes him and suddenly he is super-cool—but then he has to keep it up with continued invention and having to remember whom he has told what lies to.

It’s a tale of changing allegiances, admiring girls, researching things, a school concert and all the time with an input of ideas, even drawings, supplied by the audience. Polarbear is a master at what he does. *Mouth Open* is totally engaging.

You can’t help but enjoy it and for its target audience it is beautifully crafted at the same time as being spontaneous and incorporating the ideas of the audience. It’s about how stories are created, a spur to young creativity, identifying the difference between telling tales and telling tales lying.

“Telling a lie is selfish. Telling a story is a gift.” That is Polarbear’s message.

Reviewer: [Howard Loxton](#)