

# British Theatre Guide

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## Pufferfish

Nick Bruckman

Nick Bruckman, Ng Choon Ping And Matthew Schmolle Productions

Vault (Cage) Leake Street

6–10 March 2019

A pufferfish may seem clumsy, swim slowly and with its speckled appearance look like easy food, but it carries a deadly toxin. The socially awkward character Jeff (Jackson Milner) tells one of his victims this as they sit in his home not long before he renders him unconscious with drugs.

This is part of Nick Bruckman's stylish, sixty-minute take on Jeffrey Dahmer, who though clearly disturbed, managed to sexually assault many men and murder 17.

The show opens to a marble altar surrounded by the marble torsos of men hanging from meat hooks. Three actors give a confident engaging performance. Scenes from Jeff's story are intercut with that of Chris (Arian Nik) and his sister Anne (Asha Reid). While Anne is preparing apple pie and worrying about her "danceaholic" brother, Jeff describes a sequence of horror from his pleasure in cutting open a dead pig to his unsuccessful plan to ambush with a baseball bat a jogger who usually passed his family home.

His search for pleasure leads him to steal a mannequin, but he admits in one of the show's moments of humour that it, "didn't work out between us." He is more satisfied when he drugs and rapes men at the local sauna and, though he tells us he put some in a coma, it just leads to him being banned from the place. The consolation comes in the long line of men he kills, cuts up and occasionally preserves for later pleasure. Of one he says, "he looks good even without his arms."

The dialogue, despite its subject, is realistic with a touch of humour, but there is a slightly distanced, almost expressionistic, dreamlike quality to the violence and the action.

It doesn't explain what caused the horror or why so many people failed for so long to see what now seems so obvious about a dangerous individual. Instead, we are given the vivid contrasting pictures of Jeff's sexual interest in the dead and Anne's desperate hope that her living brother might one day return to her home.

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