

# British Theatre Guide

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

## Saer Doliau (Doll Mender)

Gwenlyn Parry

Invertigo

Finborough Theatre, London

3–23 February 2013

The Finborough's sense of adventure knows few bounds. Playing in the gaps between performances of John Van Druten's [London Wall](#) is this 1966 drama written in Welsh but made intelligible to Londoners through surtitles.

The set for that play has yet another improbable transformation by the inimical Alex Marker to become a doll mender's workshop for 75 minutes that combine black comedy, parable and a tale of the unexpected.

This is the home of Seiriol Thomas's ageing Ifans, the titular craftsman who seems a representative of his type, a jobsworth who loves his dolls like a family and knows the name of each.

He may be an eccentric but comes from the loveable strain of that breed, that is if one can overlook his dolly-racism and constant neurotic calls to his unheeding boss.

The detailed observation of an ordinary man takes a new turn with the arrival of Catherine Ayres as Merch, a dream-like biker lady who will have set many pulses racing in the audience with a minimalist leather costume of the kind rarely, if ever, seen in polite company.

Who she is remains as unclear to the doll mender as the audience. She might be a glamorous auditor, the gaffer's spy, Ifans's conscience brought to life or just conceivably an alien with a sense of humour.

In any event, the confident lady attempts to bring the doll repair business into the new millennium with the assistance of the New Romantic Llanc, played by Steffan Donnelly. While ostensibly taken on as an apprentice, he is also her henchman and possibly the herald of a new era.

By the end, the prank of all pranks has been played and the business irrevocably changed, as with every other craft these days, automation replacing good, old-fashioned skill.

Under the lively direction of Aled Pedrick for Invertigo, all three actors prove themselves to be adept comic performers and also seem to be having great fun in an infectious manner that soon spreads to their guests beyond the fourth wall.

Saer Doliau (Doll Mender), enjoying its English première almost half a century late, is a thought-provoking short piece that can easily be enjoyed despite the language barrier, though clearly, it will offer even more to any Welsh speakers who happen to be in the vicinity of Earl's Court in the next few weeks.

**Reviewer:** [Philip Fisher](#)