

British Theatre Guide

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Seaside Terror

Adam Z. Robinson and Odd Doll

Odd Doll in association with LittleMighty

Georgian Theatre Royal, Richmond, North Yorkshire

16 March 2018

Odd Doll's production turns the old-fashioned, traditional 1970s image of the British seaside town into a spoof seagull murder saga. The action is set in the imaginary upside-down-town of Southpaw-on-Sea.

A particularly grotesque Mr. Chilly has driven his ice cream van through the theatre walls and has parked it on stage with its serving hatch facing the audience. Of course, no Georgian walls were damaged during the get-in as the van is really an effective life-sized piece of scenery cleverly created by set designers Ali Allen and Charlotte Stanley.

The show is loosely based on the Punch and Judy idea where the usually violent Mr Punch and his wife Judy perform little episodes of outrageous comedy in a mobile puppet booth. Here there's an atmosphere of revenge as the roles are reversed - the puppets have become people and the people in turn are now puppets.

Our Mr. Punch has stepped out of his booth, ditched his puppet personality and become human. He's swapped the booth for an ice-cream van and he's become the sinister Mr. Chilly whose ice creams are, according to the sign on the side of his van, 'Whipped especially for you.' He isn't quite completely human as he still wears his mask with its hooked nose that nods to the 16th-century Italian *commedia dell' arte* where the roots of the original seaside puppet shows rightly belong.

I did spend a wee while trying to decide whether Mr. Chilly was really a man or a woman, but a quick look at the credits told me that this is a two-woman show in the form of expert puppeteers Kathleen Yore and Rebekah Caputo, although it is impossible to tell them apart because of the masks and black apparel.

Mr. Chilly whips the onlookers up with his banter, handing out real ice-creams to members of his audience with his barrow-boy chant of 'Sniffy reviews, sensational ices - unbeatable prices.'

The serving hatch on the ice-cream van opens up to reveal a mini stage with cartoonish puppet creatures, which could have been fashioned by Roald Dahl's illustrator Quentin Blake but are actually beautifully imagined and made by the company and costume designer Naomi Parker.

The first episode is set in a hotel room where Professor Rudolf Brisk is staying while he attends a conference in the town. He's shown to his room by the gobby, archetypal seaside landlady who announces that the hotel is proud to be vegetarian and much to Professor Brisk's chagrin, tells him there'll be no black pudding or bacon served for breakfast. Professor Brisk eventually sneaks a tub of Kentucky Fried Chicken into his room only to be assaulted by a vicious seagull who comes in through the window, attacks him and scoffs the lot. Brisk manages to kill the seagull by slamming

the sash window down on it and chopping its head off, but a gang of seagulls eventually fly in to avenge their feathered friend.

Further episodes include a suicidal donkey derby, a bingo caller who kicks the bucket while sitting on the toilet, a Beryl Cook styled fat lady called Shirley Fisher, who sings herself to death, and various other fairground attractions that inevitably go very wrong.

The whole thing is well done and it never ceases to amaze me how easy it is to ignore visible puppeteers dressed in black and to only see the puppets they are animating.

The programme/pamphlet (Volume 666 No 13) is a whacky idea that's full of snippets of madness. There's an amusing report about the Southpaw Helter Skelter that "has been a beacon of joy for generations, but over recent months it has fallen victim to a wave of juvenile graffiti. Repeatedly, the iconic, imposing structure has been spray-painted to resemble male genitalia." There's also a tongue-in-cheek missing persons column and a few classified ads, including "USED TOMBSTONE available. Standard grey stone and a good buy for someone named Gary."

Writer Adam Z. Robinson and Odd Doll have cleverly produced a kind of indoor street theatre, that's really well written and executed (pun intended). However, the show does lack the coherence and pace that the addition of a director would have brought to the production. Also, at just 60 minutes in length it could benefit from an extra couple of stories.

I did enjoy it though; I mean, where else would the anti-hero be dragged off to a watery grave by a herd of dead donkeys? Bizarre and totally bonkers - it's certainly a show that I'll remember.

Reviewer: [Helen Brown](#)