

British Theatre Guide

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Signals

David Farn

Hands on NE

Exchange, North Shields

11 November 2016

A few curious things about this play; the night before I saw it, the author David Farn was talking about the new work to a Scratch Theatre night at the same venue. Farn spoke eloquently and passionately about the disturbing influence of social media on our lives.

The play itself revolves round the elderly Welsh nature poet Owen Brecon and his resistance to the proposals to erect a new communications mast in his beloved valley.

David Farn himself plays the poet and, in an unusual move, after the play's performance he comes out into the audience in character selling copies of a poetry pamphlet, *The Late Poems of Owen Brecon*. The poems are actually written by David Farn and they're pretty good, revealing a new side to his writing talents.

Poems such as *Social Mediation* evoke the malign influences of social media in distancing us from more important realities. ("Meanwhile, the countryside remains empty, / the trees unclimbed, the streams unpaddled / the paths abandoned to the brambles / And that girl I met once in Radnor / By the lake, remains unknissed.")

When he came out amongst us, Farn's character was an irascible old intellectual with a humorous glint in his eye. Despite his age, he was, we felt, still raging against the dying of the light.

Yet on stage under Dolores Poretta-Brown's direction, he's portrayed more or less as a spent force, withdrawn, bitter, lacking energy or colour, shuffling round the set like a founder member of the Miserabilists Society, the humour and ironies in his script underplayed. And the interpretation is the more surprising given the director herself is among Tyneside theatre world's most colourful characters.

Brecon is more than a codger railing against technology. He, and the author, have important things to say. This interpretation of the poet unbalances the play which at its centre needs a more animated and contrasting version, a tragic-comic figure even.

Kylie Ann Ford plays Brecon's daughter Dawn, dreaming of escape from her rural prison. Danielle Miller is Parveen, sent in by the energy company to "soften up" the poet to support the new telecommunications mast, with Steven Stobbs as Ron, initially Parveen's jack-the lad of a taxi-driver, who then sticks around looking for ways to trouser a few bob.

All three hover round the poet like wasps round the honey with their own agenda and romantic intrigues between the three also become likely (perm any two from three). Which can be good fun, if occasionally long-winded and distracting. It's a strong cast, though the hinted titanic clash of ideals and ideas lurking in the the play never quite crystallises.

Hands on NE is a newish company which splendidly promotes the region's dramatists. As indeed does The Exchange, the only real theatre in North Shields, which had been dark for years but now under the careful guidance of Day 8 Theatre and its administrator Karen Knox is beginning to attract a lively programme of theatre and music to its two performance spaces complete with bar and restaurant.

The audience for *Signals* was small. But then cultural revolutions don't happen overnight and it's a promising start.

Reviewer: [Peter Mortimer](#)