

# British Theatre Guide

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

## Siren

Peter Briffa  
Chilling Out Theatre  
Etcetera Theatre  
(2010)

This is a two hander that presents us with a prostitute and one of her clients. He is middle-aged, Irish, married and obsessed with her. She is young and attractive. Is she the siren of the title or is it that the police car's wail we can hear outside? At this Camden pub theatre it is as likely to be real life as a sound effect. There is certainly good reason for calling the police: by the end of the first scene there is a body on the bed and another hanging dead in the next room. What brought things to this?

Peter Briffa's play takes us back to their first meeting in this same room five years earlier and traces many subsequent ones to show the pattern of their relationship. It does so backwards, peeling off a layer at a time, until we see her slinky seductress in a bright red dress bringing him back her for the very first time. But is this more than a gimmick, running things backward like the music tracks that bridge some rapid costumes changes? It points up the way in which each apparent honesty is just another lie to replace an earlier set of lies, so making us constantly aware of the conflict between reality and role play. The only truly honest dialogue, apart from the rates quoted for different services, appear to be the telephone conversations each has with others, and even they are not telling the whole truth.

Played chronologically from first to last meeting, I wonder how well this succession of short scenes would hold for its fifty minutes or so; only rarely do we have a sustained conversation that seems to dig a little deeper but reversed it becomes like an archaeological exploration, digging back and down to look for scraps of evidence to piece the facts together.

That it works is due chiefly to the playing of Paula Gilbert and Glenn Speers as Kate and Geoff (if those really are their names). He claims to be some kind of advertising executive - he talks about celebrating winning an account, she is a 'nice middle class girl' (his description) who says she got into the game to pay her way through university. This is not a sleazy set-up. This whore offers her clients a shower both before and after.

Designer Aaron J. Dootson has set it with elegant simplicity, a hanging louvered blind, a big pristine bed, one white table for champagne and glasses and an expensive looking chair, and he lights it attractively.

Director Paul Blinkhorn paces scenes carefully and keeps the whole thing enigmatic. You are never quite sure whether Speer's angry outbursts as Geoff are because Kate won't entirely play along with his fantasy or whether they are at her refusing to let it be more than role play - though the opening suggests that for him at least their relationship has become all too real.

*Ends 13th August 2010*

Reviewer: [Howard Loxton](#)