

British Theatre Guide

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Skank

Clementine Bogg-Hargroves

Get Giddier

Tribeca, Manchester

18–21 July 2019

Skank is a derogatory term used to describe people thought to have loose morals. As, for most of the play, the central character spends her time passing sarcastic remarks about other people, one wonders if *Snide* might have been a more appropriate title.

Kate (sole performer Clementine Bogg-Hargroves who also wrote the play) works as a temp. She finds the job undemanding and, having run through her weekly workload in a few hours, passes her time making judgmental remarks about her colleagues or clumsy passes at her fantasy object, Gary. Outside of work, however, Kate is a bundle of anxieties—an insomniac who compulsively carries around a comfort object and does not hesitate to condemn herself as a *Skank*.

Clementine Bogg-Hargroves reverses the approach usually taken in theatre to characters like Kate. Instead of gradually revealing the vulnerabilities lying under Kate's cocky, wise-cracking exterior, Bogg-Hargroves concentrates almost exclusively on her superficial outer personality. Kate does not slowly put aside her defences but shouts out her problems ("at least I got a full eight hours staring at the ceiling sweating" she recalls of her attempt at sleep) while continuing with her daily life. Kate, therefore, behaves just like most of us do when aware of a potential serious health problem—ignoring it and hoping it will just go away.

The approach taken is brave as Kate's outward personality is far from pleasant. Without a clear goal in life—despite never having put pen to paper Kate has aspirations to be a writer—she drifts from one pointless pastime to another while not hiding the scorn she feels for other people. Kate has an acid tongue and it is only in moments of silence—a wordless glance to the audience as she submits to the indignity of a smear test—that it is possible to sense her inner stress. Kate's only outward sign of her internal anxiety is eccentrically endearing—carrying a baked bean can around like a comfort blanket.

Concentrating on Kate's sharp tongue and social and sexual misadventures, however, makes for a constantly funny play. Bogg-Hargroves has a keen eye for the absurdities of modern life with Kate joining communal knitting classes and feigning interest in the mundane hobbies of her workmates. The dialogue is excellent; you find yourself laughing along even while disliking Kate's judgmental attitude.

Although written as a monologue, *Skank* is staged as a full theatrical show. Vocal recordings of Bogg-Hargroves adopting a range of (occasionally dubious) accents allow Kate to interact with the other characters. Bogg-Hargroves does not hesitate to involve the audience—moving into the midst to share her concerns in intimate fashion. True to the spirit of fringe theatre, a pulley and string converts a desk into a doctor's examination table.

Skank presents a character who is hard to like but easy to understand. In distracting herself with trivialities and trying to ignore truly frightening developments, Kate is just like the rest of us.

Reviewer: [David Cunningham](#)