

British Theatre Guide

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

Skittles

Richard Marsh

York Theatre Royal Studio

6 June 2012

The TakeOver Festival at York Theatre Royal, which presents young people with the opportunity to programme, market, produce and generally, well, *take over* the theatre for more than a fortnight, has brought to York a real diversity of performances and events.

Richard Marsh visits on the back of Edinburgh success with this one-man poetry / comedy / storytelling show about love, failure and sweets. Like last week's double bill of *Crave* and *Illusions*, this is a show which would not perhaps normally be seen in the Theatre Royal, but, like that performance, it's one I'm glad to have had the chance to see.

Marsh is a charming presence, and his 50-minute monologue is performed with ease and confidence, even when, as frequently occurs, it changes gear from his winning conversational tone to rhythmic, rhyming sequences. Though you'd be hard pushed to tell, these were originally crafted as individual poems. On a theme, perhaps—yearning, and the messiness of love (and its constituent parts) runs through them—but woven into a coherent narrative they become compelling and, indeed, the transitions are seamless.

The narrative is one in which an (extremely one-sided) office flirtation turns to a whirlwind romance, to marriage and thence to quick disintegration, leaving the protagonist-narrator in tatters and almost bed-bound by sorrow—some would say self-pity.

As 'a character called Richard', Marsh in his fictionalised persona takes us through a narrative that's at the same time as deep as the Grand Canyon he visits on honeymoon, and the simplest story. The sweep and flow of the poetry feels contemporary; hip hop is clearly as much of an influence as recent poets. But this does not lead the performance into artifice, insincerity or fakery. Marsh may be playing 'Marsh', but the insights ring true. His rhymes and lines are witty, and yet at times lurch to painful candour. 'You can't shatter shards' punches home as Marsh describes his heart: unbreakable, as already broken.

And yet, while Sorrow (and, fleetingly, Her prime envoy on earth, Morrissey) turn up at times in the narrative, this is not a performance in which to wallow, but rather one with which to rejoice. It feels cathartic without being twee or trite.

Though this was the final outing currently scheduled for the performance in its present form, Richard Marsh will be back at Edinburgh this summer in *Dirty Great Love Story*, performing alongside fellow poet-performer Katie Bonna. On this evidence the show, and Marsh, will be well worth following.

Reviewer: [Mark Love-Smith](#)