

British Theatre Guide

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Smack Family Robinson

Richard Bean

Live Theatre, Newcastle-upon-Tyne

(2003)

They're just an ordinary family, living in a well-off area of Whitley Bay, just north of the mouth of the Tyne. There's dad (Gavin) and mam (Catherine), the two boys Robert and Sean, and the baby of the family, eighteen year old Cora. Dad's retired from the family business and turned it over to Sean who employs Robert, who has, as they say, special needs, as his driver. Cora, however, isn't going into the family business: she's at college studying catering. Mam still works: she has a flower shop, and a very successful one, too, with an enviable turnover.

Now Sean has ideas for improving profitability. He doesn't like the idea of carrying a lot of debtors so he is using the the services of a factor. Very modern. Very enterprising.

And what is this business? For 35 years the Robinsons have been purveyors of drugs to community of Whitley Bay. Which is why mam's flowershop has a turnover of a million a year. It's the money laundry, along with dad's little business of buying and selling stamps on the side.

Stir in the murder of Pammy (Robert's junkie wife), a couple of Russian *mafiosi*, a "harmless old twat of a hippy" who has never changed since the sixties ("Love, peace, a bit of nicking"), and a boyfriend nicknamed Dracula, and you have a very funny, slightly black comedy, which is firmly grounded in Geordie culture (in its widest sense!) and pushes the family business saga story as far as it will go without degenerating into the ridiculous.

The performances are excellent - veteran NE actor Colin Maclachlan as Gavin, Judi Earl (Catherine), Mike Goodenough (Robert), David Nellist (Sean) and Laura Norton, in her first professional role, as Cora.

Live Theatre is thirty years old this year and still continues the policy it began with: to encourage new writing. The rollcall of writers it has commissioned in the past is impressive and includes Alan Plater, CP Taylor, Tom Hadaway and Lee Hall. Later this year it will work with the RSC in a co-production of a new play by poet Sean O'Brien.

They have successfully continued this tradition with Richard Bean, who was writer in residence at the RNT in 2001 and whose [Under the Whaleback](#) opened at the Royal Court last month.

Smack Family Robinson is, as people are so fond of saying around here, a "canny laugh", undemanding but very entertaining. It runs until 14th June.

Reviewer: [Peter Lathan](#)