

British Theatre Guide

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Step Back In Time

Bor Productions

Grand Theatre, Blackpool

23 July–7 September 2013

In 1980 it's reckoned comedy duo Cannon & Ball played to a million people around the country, including a sold-out summer season on Blackpool's North Pier.

And that was before the days of massive arenas—or for that matter the likes of karaoke bars, MTV, *Strictly Come Dancing* and hard-faced TV talent show judges, all of which cross the mind while watching this bold summer entertainment.

Given its location, and rich heritage of summer variety shows, the Grand is right to try and re-invent the tradition, and troupers like Cannon & Ball would be the first to concede that things are never going to be what they were—no matter what this show's name might suggest. It's the first of two they are headlining at the venue.

So instead there's more than a nod to the style of a Las Vegas lounge show, or more especially the cruise ship entertainment for which the producers of these two shows have form.

It's exactly the type of production that a resort desperate to re-invent itself demands, but as cabaret, rather than a full theatrical performance that warrants much more by way of staging.

A hard-working team of dancers provide the bulk of the evening's entertainment, even if they're not yet quite hitting all their marks in a series of rock 'n' roll, Queen, Bee Gees, Michael Jackson and disco medleys.

They're backed by an equally professional singer Katie Shepherd whose slinkiness, and a voice that can hold a note longer than some people hold a grudge, lend her a striking stage presence.

Variety's tradition is upheld with novelty performers like juggler Romano Frediani who proves his own Vegas credentials with an act that appears to constantly teeter on chaos, but which he assuredly rescues from ruin.

He and lithe aerialist Shauvana Dana both suffer from inelegant lighting throughout their acts, and neither are given the courtesy of a curtain call for their applause. Those, and other cueing glitches, need urgent attention.

At the top of the bill, and taking over much of the second act, Cannon & Ball do what they do so well—and have been doing for 51 years—even if they seemed to rush some of the routine.

But when it comes to working a house, and incessantly picking on one or two of its theatregoers at the same time, they have nothing left to learn.

The only real lesson here is that variety is not dead, but may be in need of a transplant to a more contemporary setting?

Reviewer: [David Upton](#)