

British Theatre Guide

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The Forsythe Sisters

Lucy Rivers and Hannah McPake

Gagglebabble

Norwegian Church, Cardiff Bay

4–14 February 2015

Gagglebabble, the company built around the multiple talents of Lucy Rivers and Hannah McPake, achieved notable success on the Edinburgh Fringe and nationwide in 2013 with their dark-toned country-and-western musical *The Bloody Ballad*. Their second offering, *The Forsythe Sisters*, again fuses live music with sinister drama.

The Norwegian Church, in which the piece is premièring, is one of Cardiff Bay's most distinctive landmarks. It's not the most sinister of buildings, though, having retained the appearance of a cottage hospital, its function when on its original site. It is to the credit of the company that Gagglebabble manages to turn this unassuming arts centre into a place of dread and mystery.

The evening commences with Gill (Catrin Aaron), the venue's ditzzy manager, welcoming the audience to an evening of supernatural, musical entertainment, this year's non-traditional Valentine's day offering. She is assisted/hampered by her sceptical brother, techie/DJ Charlie (Malcolm Hamilton).

The special guests are the Forsythe Sisters—Morven (McPake) and the visually impaired Maggie (Rivers). Clad in identical blue dresses and yellow tights, their act combines the musical (Morven on cello, Maggie on guitar and violin, both singing) with the psychic—mind-reading, summoning up spirits, etc (it took me a while to get the "Forsythe/foresight" pun).

They tell the sorry tale of their lost family home, on the cliff across the bay from the church, and the catastrophic fire in which their parents perished and Maggie lost her sight, but gained the gift of another kind of vision. It soon becomes clear, however, that their act is all fakery. Or is it...?

Pretty soon, Gill and Charlie, who are mourning the recent passing of their mother, become intimately involved in the goings on; an abandoned lover (Simon Ludders) reappears to sow discord between the sisters; and there's even an appearance from an all-in-black, rock'n'roll Grim Reaper character (Dan Lambert).

The script is loose enough to incorporate some light audience interaction whilst retaining control of a narrative whose theme is the power of love, both familial and the Valentine's Day kind.

Rivers's songs, largely in the folk vein, with occasional outbreaks of heartfelt balladry, are highly effective. Most of the doomy music is played live, although there is added input from Samuel Jones.

Director Adele Thomas makes clever use of several parts of the venue, with one vital exchange taking place in the upstairs gallery, and the sudden appearance of a face at the window causing

several audience members to gasp. Jane Lalljee's lighting effects and Dan Lawrence's sound design contribute more than generously to the air of spookiness.

Skilfully assembled and seamlessly executed, *The Forsythe Sisters* is great fun and well worth an hour of your time. Unless, of course, you have to walk home alone in the dark...

Reviewer: [Othniel Smith](#)