

British Theatre Guide

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Time is Love / Tiempo es Amor

Ché Walker

Jezebel Productions and Dragon Bait Productions with Graffiti Productions in association with Neil McPherson for the Finborough Theatre

Finborough Theatre

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Time is Love, getting its European première after a first staging last year by the Stella Adler Academy in Hollywood, is a play about possessiveness, infidelity, sexual need and jealousy. It is set among Los Angeles Latinos (or Latinxs to use the gender-neutral term which the programme introduced me to) and some of the dialogue is in Spanish. This cast switch between languages with fluency and the accented energy of the exchanges in Spanish helps to raise the temperature to a more Californian level without making you feel you have missed something important if you don't understand it.

Like Walker's 1998 Camden-set play *Been So Long* (later made into both [musical](#) and the movie), it features a guy who has come out of gaol. In this case, it is Blaz (Gabriel Akuwudike) who has spent three years in prison and now discovers that his long-term lover Havana (Jessica Ledon) has been unfaithful. It may have only been a one-night stand and just once in three years but it was with Seamus (Cary Crankson), the bent cop who arrested him, which makes it seem worse.

Blaz himself isn't entirely faithful for there's an involvement with sex worker Serena (Sasha Frost) and an attraction to Havana's lap-dance best friend Rosa (whom Sheila Atim makes a cool-headed, ironic observer) and a close emotional bond with his friend Karl (Benjamin Cawley).

Walker has said that the play was sparked by the thought "What if Desdemona was guilty?" *Time is Love* doesn't try to rewrite *Othello* but it has some of the same themes, with Karl as a kind of Iago, perhaps jealous of the attention Blaz gives women.

Plotting and exposition are rather confusing but, as director, Walker is boldly theatrical. He even starts with text on screen statements about theatre before a window above them opens and Serena starts telling the story. She switches time backwards and masked figures enter flashing torches through the darkness and pointing guns at the audience. What is going on? Is it a burglary? Confusing but dramatic and rather stylized.

Lighting is used sparingly, sometimes just a single beam shining where needed, and video used frequently, shown behind the action to underline it with the same moment in more detail: as with close-up glimpses of Havana and Seamus and a turmoil of bedclothes as the live actors represent sex more symbolically.

Language too takes off into poetic metaphor. There's a vivid description of orgasm as turning into pterodactyls and flying off. Movement is choreographed, images created and Sheila Atim has composed a musical soundscape that aids atmosphere.

However, the play holds the attention more by its theatricality than any real identification with the characters. Though we learn some surprising details, such as Serena, as a child, being taken by her mother to see Bernard Shaw's *Mrs Warren's Profession*, we don't find out enough about them or, despite some powerful acting, really believe in them.

The brief passages in Spanish (which I don't speak) had a stronger reality. Had this something to do with the speed of delivery? *Time is Love* lasts only about ninety minutes. Given time to open up, to dig deeper and more firmly anchored in its setting, it has the potential to offer much more.

Reviewer: [Howard Loxton](#)