

British Theatre Guide

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

Too True to Be Good

George Bernard Shaw

Bitter Pill Productions in association with Nicola Seed and Phil Anderson-Dyer

Finborough Theatre

(2009)

Sarah Norman is to be congratulated for reviving this highly entertaining polemical comedy in a small scale production that avoids compromises.

The play, first seen in 1932, is not well known although the RSC produced it with the future nobility, Sir Ian McKellen and Dame Judi Dench, the best part of 35 years ago.

It has the best and worst qualities of a fine playwright, addressing serious issues through a comedy but occasionally allowing the characters to act as long-winded advocates of views that are surely closer to those of their creator than themselves.

It starts as pure fantasy as the spoiled, coddled "Mopsy" (Olivia Lumley) is joined in her fight against rubella (and Jenny Lee as her overbearing mother) by the frustrated green embodiment of a microbe.

Her night nurse is no such thing. Emily Bowker's Sweetie is a common (in every sense) thief in league with the silver tongued Aubrey, played with appropriate suaveness by Alex Blake.

The trio cook up a plan that leaves them after the first interval in a hot (highly appropriate in the dear old Finborough) colony run not so much by its pompous but ineffectual Colonel (Roger Braban) but his strategically adroit adjutant, an omniscient Private inappropriately named Meek (Tai Lawrence).

There, the plotting rather unwinds but Too Good to be True develops into an anti-War morality play that also takes a few pops not only at religion but its antithesis (from James Clarkson as "the atheist who has lost his faith - in atheism").

It also propounds a feminist message through no fewer than three mouths, the reformed Mother, her daughter freed from the strictures of class and the chambermaid-thief about to be redeemed by the love of a good man (James Hogg).

Shaw overdoes the speechifying a little during the 2½ hours including two intervals. Even so, there is some astute observation of human foibles and highly thought-provoking ideas, not forgetting lots of laughs, making this is really delightful way to spend an evening.

Reviewer: [Philip Fisher](#)