

British Theatre Guide

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Trimming Pablo

Dave Sheasby

Theatre Royal Studio, York

(2005)

Did you know that the Second World Peace Conference was held in Sheffield in 1950, and that Pablo Picasso addressed the delegates and auctioned a drawing for £21? Neither did I, and thanks to Labour PM Clem Attlee's deference to the USA (there's nothing new under the sun, is there?) neither did many people in Sheffield at the time. Cold War paranoia resulted in the conference being drastically scaled down to a single evening of speeches in the City Hall, and many of the leftist luminaries - including Neruda and Shostakovitch - were not allowed into the country. But Picasso was in Steel City long enough to get a haircut (hence the title), buy a multi-purpose knife complete with "a tool for removing boy scouts from horses' hooves" and ask for a Pernod at the hotel bar. He had to make do with a Stone's Ginger Wine, but no-one ever claimed that Sheffield was sophisticated

Writer/director Dave Sheasby's clever and very funny play sheds new light on this bizarre little fragment of Cold War history. Aptly described as a "cubist comedy", it's also a multi-faceted digression on art, politics, celebrity and class. This was an era in which the dreaded 11+ fixed a great and life-long gulf between sheep and goats, winners and losers, and only the brightest working-class children had access to the world of literature and art their middle-class counterparts took for granted. The irony of the communist Picasso producing works that only the privileged few were able to appreciate, let alone afford, is never far from the surface.

Trimming Pablo is not, strictly speaking, a one man show; it's a one man and a life-size wooden model show. The man is the multi-talented Fine Time Fontayne, the model is of course Picasso (in his Stripy Jumper Period). Fontayne plays a host of characters including the narrator, the barber who trimmed Pablo, a Commie-bashing vendor of pocket knives, a Welsh MI5 man hiding under the City Hall stage with only a packet of Spam sandwiches for company, a down-on-her-luck prostitute, and - very briefly and in Spanish - Picasso himself. Oh, and he also sings and plays the organ and guitar. It's a mesmerizing performance of a beautifully written and touching play.

"Trimming Pablo" runs until 26th February

Reviewer: [J. D. Atkinson](#)