

British Theatre Guide

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

VL

Kieron Hurley and Gary McNair
Francesca Moody Productions
ROUNABOUT @ Summerhall
2–26 August 2024



Getting the band back together can seem like an awfy good idea. You contact the person who had the original idea, then the one with the space to put things into, the person who can access the big van and the whole of the team in one place to make merry hell once again. Having one of the OGs off on another directing gig is a shame and a pity but not going to stop us now. And so here we have almost got the full 4-4-2 follow up to [Square Go](#) that was a tremendous hit just a few short years ago.

But VL falls just a little short of the original.

Don't get me wrong, this is a piece of theatrical brilliance with Max and Stevie played by Scott Fletcher and Gavin Jon Wright once more, triumphantly back to give us more mischief and mayhem as these two chancers, flirting on the edge of being in trouble, out of trouble, pure shitting themselves on a daily basis and just trying to make it to adulthood are fantastic storytellers. They tell the tale of a typical Scottish secondary school.

The script sparkles with wit and a Bob Mortimer style of character naming that is heard up and down the highways and corridors of nondescript, stinky Scottish schools from Shetland to Stranraer. From being under the radar to what you could take an eye out with, this is irreverent and hilarious from the perspective of a young kid from a beat-up area just wanting to get to the end of each day without a reddy, never mind a pure one. McNair and Hurley have this pitch-perfect. In Fletcher and Wright, they have two of the most scandalously well-observed scamps who need to be more than just naughty to make it.

The story about getting from second year to third year as someone who is more than technically not a VL (VL = Virgin Lips) is heart-warmingly funny but also holds the tragedy of youth in the hand of the absurdity of what it takes to survive.

And I laughed out loud at all of the stories. There was a woman a few seats away likely to lose her teeth, the dignity went out the window two minutes in, as she was in uncontrollable fits. Both Fletcher and Wright work the audience well, referring back to previous conversations and giving people in the crowd a reddy too. But it is not of its time, nor is it peculiar to Scotland. There are similar rites of passage the world over and similarly confused teenagers trying to fit in and trying not to stand out. There are daily opportunities for humiliation throughout schooldays as that wee guy with the swagger makes your life hell. That is part of the appeal here, but it is also the interplay which does really hit upon the local references and make them truly collectively felt.

Returning to anything can be a problem, because what was once fresh and original now needs to be better to equal it. I may not have laughed as heartily as the woman in the audience, but I could see this having more in it to take both Max and Stevie further forward. Imagine them on their first day in their first ever job, in a call centre, or at the school prom, trying to get into college and face that interview and all of that. I can. And I would happily hang round the bins tae watch it.

Reviewer: [Donald C Stewart](#)