

British Theatre Guide

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Worth a Flutter

Michael Head

Hope Theatre

1–19 May 2018

“Sarf” Londoner Matthew isn’t a great success with women: when he thinks he’s found one, his old mate Paul pops up to pinch them. With his bright blue eyes a sparkling come-on, he’s been doing it since their school days, though it’s true that Matt sometimes got Paul’s leftovers.

Now Matt’s got Paige, a stunner, and he’s her official fiancé. The trouble is, as he describes it, “she’s thick as two short planks.” Perhaps Paul turning up at the Grange Cafe where he’s meeting Paige is for the best, but it doesn’t help Matt’s confidence when he feels drawn to Helen who runs the Bermondsey café.

Matt, who tells his own story—who describes himself as “a semi-professional poker player”, though I thought I also heard a reference to driving a taxi—is wonderfully warm and friendly. I don’t know whether it’s a role dramatist Michael Head consciously wrote it for himself but there couldn’t be better casting.

Since Matt is doing the telling, the others are as he sees them and director Jonathon Carr has encouraged performances that reflect this, becoming increasingly more comically caricatured, and some hilariously grotesque doubling to present Matt’s pipe-smoking, bank-robber granddad, Paige’s parents and the lecherous old voyeur in the next flat to Helen’s above her café.

As Matt tells his story, episodes get acted out from his first encounter with Lucy Pander’s Paige (when she fetched up over his footwear then went back to his place) through his courtship of Clare McNamara’s vulnerable but no-nonsense Helen.

After the interval, Sam (Jack Harding), who is also dating Helen, for a time takes over narration. He says he’s not very good at telling stories but we soon learn that after eight years of marriage things were going wrong for them. Lucy Pinder now plays his wife and Michael Head is Martin, a bumptious bloke from his office in whom he confides.

Though *Worth a Flutter* keeps its audience laughing, there is a strong undercurrent of comment about loneliness, the awkwardness of male-female relationship and the pain of life that often finds its expression in surreal satire.

It is a third level of performance that hasn’t found its style yet: just adding more volume and bluster doesn’t do it; a horse race doesn’t quite work but a kilted involuntary erection with a Scots accent (there when it shouldn’t be but not when you need it) and a boxing ring bout between suitors take the comedy up onto another plane. You *will* come out laughing.

Reviewer: [Howard Loxton](#)