

British Theatre Guide

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Young Love

Jake Talbot

Dare to Know Theatre

53two, Manchester

17–19 August 2023

Previous productions from Dare to Know Theatre have been modest in scale but high in quality. With an original score composed by Chloe Greenfield, choreography by Jayne Sladen, not to mention a cast totalling 17 performers and breaking the single-act barrier, *Young Love* is a swaggering confident show, not characterised by a lack of ambition.

Jake Talbot's perceptive script tackles heavyweight themes in an engaging and entertaining manner. Talbot takes the positive viewpoint the current generation is the first one in which people have the opportunity to truly be themselves, and then goes on to examine the complexities and contradictions of that position.

The crisp dialogue communicates concepts in a beautifully concise way. A father, who is struggling with the decision of his son to transition, is advised, "he is still your child," but makes the brutal response, "yes, but not my daughter." Yet the script never bogs down in self-conscious navel-gazing. During the blank verse poem opening act two, in which the cast examine the characteristics of "The Broken Generation", a grim list is enlivened by the observation it is like music from Gary Barlow in the late 1990s.

Young Love is told in instalments, jumping between the different characters. The fragmented nature of the play means that not all the storylines reach a conclusion. A plotline concerning a relationship in which one person is asexual ends just as some interesting conflict is introduced with the partner deciding the approach is no longer sufficiently fulfilling.

There are, however, points at which words fail and director Miranda Parker falls back to physical movement, choreographed by Jayne Sladen, to articulate the feelings (or frustrations) of the characters. Ambiguously, it is never clear if the cast moving together represent a communal response to the topic of young love or a mob bullying those who do not conform to the norm.

Young Love is staged theatre-in-the-round with the cast in the middle of the audience. Abandoned swimming pools, and their association with luxury gone to seed, are often used to symbolise decline and dereliction. The impressively convincing run-down swimming pool in which events in the play take place (designed by Ste Jackson and David Talbot) is used to signify defiance. The audience enters passing through the cast as they move in a slow-motion, trance-like state as though they have occupied a vacant premises for an illicit rave.

For a show with such an accomplished script, the decision to open with a non-verbal scene is daring. Sophie Hough wanders through the crowd as if seeking a companion and leading members of the ensemble in individual dance routines, before starting a round-robin discussion on the definition of love. The only aspect of the production which is not fully successful is the theatre-in-

the-round approach—one key speech wrapping up a storyline is inaudible as the performer is facing the other side of the stage.

Director Parker utilises the large cast in a striking manner. The entire cast is onstage throughout, stepping forward to take on individual roles or serving as part of a chorus. The latter is particularly effective in conveying peer pressure as a jeering mob heckles an individual who is reluctant to lose his virginity.

This demanding approach catches the chaos and conflict of love, but, more importantly, its intoxicating, even addictive nature. While the play takes a largely positive outlook, it does not shy away from the possibility of love being exhausted by circumstances. A teen taking on unwanted caring responsibilities finds her affection and respect for her ailing father is running low. The overall viewpoint of *Young Love* may be that, even if a love affair becomes frustrating and does not reach the desired objective, simply taking part is reward enough.

Young Love is a stunning demonstration of Dare to Know Theatre achieving the potential promised by previous productions.

Reviewer: [David Cunningham](#)