

festival 07 reviews

Miller lifts the spirits as he takes religion to new level

Bigger than Jesus

Assembly, St George's West
★★★

A ONE-MAN show about Christianity has the potential to be a theatrical nightmare. Canadian Rick Miller, however, does so many interesting and unusual things with this tricky topic, that he creates a performance that is by turns hilarious, touching and disturbing.

Miller starts the show by introducing himself and his subject. He will be leading a Catholic liturgy, using this as a frame on which to hang his various characterisations of Jesus and examine the way our society sees him.

This first part of the evening is effectively stand-up, Miller drawing on anecdotes from his own Catholic past, gently mocking religious doctrine as he does so.

His aim, he says, is to tell the story of Christ from a different angle, and although there are lots of laughs, things feel slightly confused, as if

Miller doesn't really know what he wants from the show.

This feeling lingers but does not mar the brilliance of Miller's performance. His energy levels do not flag for a single moment, whether in the character of a break-dancing, foul-mouthed Deep South Preacher, all-forgiving Air Jesus Flight Attendant, or analytical and witty university lecturer Jesus.

The tone swings from educational to missionary to confessional to absurdist, the order of proceedings ensuring that light follows dark and things become neither overly silly nor overly bleak.

Live filming and digital projection are used inventively, allowing Miller to stage a toy figurine last supper, interact with himself in different roles and play with words on an enormous high-tech white board.

Particularly powerful is the live photo-montage of religious images and family photographs that marks the end of the Air Jesus section. Until August 26.

JO CAIRD

Hamlet really is on his own

Hamlet (solo)

Assembly, St Georges West
★★★

THIS is an abridged version of Shakespeare's tragedy with all 17 parts played by Raoul Bhaneja.

The production is beyond minimalist, with no set other than a black curtain, no lighting and the plainest of plain black costumes.

Bhaneja is an outstanding performer who owns every inch of the space, and carries the sense of the play with passion and conviction. While Bard-nerds and budding actors will probably love this, for those who haven't seen the play in its full form, don't let this be a first encounter.

Until August 27

LUCY RIBCHESTER

Too slow to be a monster hit

The Big Ugly Monster and the Little Stone Rabbit,
Pleasance Above, Pleasance
★★

AS the house lights dim, pre-recorded storyteller Rik Mayall recounts the tale of the Big Ugly Monster and the Little Stone Rabbit.

An adaptation of Chris Wormell's children's book, which tells of a monster so ugly that animals run away, it's far from clear what that message is.

Although the production makes clever use of costumes and music, the show is slow and is short of the magic that is a requirement of successful children's theatre.

Until August 26

JO CAIRD

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