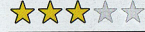


Speechless



Inspired by Marjorie Wallace's book, *The Silent Twins*, *Speechless* tells the story of June and Jennifer Gibbons, a pair of identical twins who live in their own secret world and refuse to speak to anyone except each other. The only black children at their school, June and Jennifer are taunted for the colour of their skin and withdraw still further into their special relationship, until ultimately they turn to violence and crime as an expression of their tortured existences.

The cast of five all offer fine performances, but Natasha Gordon and Demi Oyediram are mesmerising as Jennifer and June respectively. They evoke with particular effectiveness the terrible tension at the heart of the twins' relationship: on the one hand, the love and security they share; on the other, the hatred that stems from total dependence. This tension is powerfully physicalised each time the twins fight, their clinches turning to embraces and back again. It is testament to Gordon and Oyediram's skill, as well as that of director Polly Teale, that we're never quite sure who has the upper hand, physically or emotionally.

Some excellent comic relief is provided early on by the character of the mother and the imaginative games the twins play in the safety of their bedroom, but as the drama goes on, this light-heartedness fades and a sense of unremitting grimness prevails. *Speechless* is a powerful piece of drama with much to recommend it, but ultimately feels too heavy-handed to be truly effective. [Jo Caird]

**Traverse Theatre, times vary,
5-29 Aug, not 9, 16, 23, £11.00**

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