



Waiting for Lefty



When Clifford Odets's *Waiting for Lefty* was first produced in New York in 1935, the Great Depression was barely over; although conditions had improved, unemployment levels were still high and industry was

in a fragile state. This series of interrelated vignettes doesn't address the Depression directly, but its characters, unionised cab drivers and their families, are reeling from the years of hardship they have undergone. Underpaid, badly treated and unable to provide for their loved ones, these men and women

are justified in their anger and desperation.

This production, however, shifts the action away from its original context and into a deliberately undefined time and place, thereby muddling the play's politics and undermining the characters' motivations. The references to "reds" and "company spies" are incongruous where they should be shocking, and the union discussions have a distracting ring of cliché.

Placing performers amongst the audience in the union meeting scenes provides a pleasing immediacy and the urgency of the cabbies' heated dialogue makes for an enlivening beginning. The young cast, however, do themselves no favours by rushing many moments that would better suit a more measured approach. The domestic scenes are a case in point.

With no guiding narrative to fall back on, this type of episodic play depends upon the audience being able to empathise immediately with the figures put before them. Unfortunately, in the case of *Waiting for Lefty*, empathy is an ask too much. [Jo Caird]

Pleasance Courtyard,
1:30pm - 2:30pm, 4-30
Aug, not 16, 23, £5.00