



Shams past reviews

On *Reykjavik* (2010 – ongoing):

Shams' production of *Reykjavik* was an amazing theatrical experience. From the moment you were asked to don white hooded forensic suits and were handed goggles in the foyer you sensed that you were going to participate in a unique encounter.

Ushered into the auditorium by similarly clad actors the audience stood behind a white cloth waiting in anticipation, not knowing what to expect. A series of coloured lights and images were projected onto the cloth with voices amplified and telling a story about Iceland and then performer Jonathan Young appears through the white 'glacier' and welcomes us to this inhospitable land and we all go under the cloth into a new fresh world and are invited to explore. There are mirrors on wheels, a large bed, a sink, clothes hanging, candles burning on a Buddhist shrine and a white floor marked in squares with numbered stickers in them; numbers that correspond to the ones on our suits - intriguing.

Young is a consummate storyteller and performer. Slowly the fragments of his life are revealed and rather like forensic scientists the audience piece together his story. He visited Paris and fell in love with a beautiful woman who was separated from her husband and has two children. We are asked to participate in a dance class and discover that we must: "grasp your future, let go of the past and it will lead to freedom."

For Jonathan (known as Y) this leads him to Iceland where he tries to continue his seduction of his lover known as S with turbulent results. The picture created is one of extremes, ice-cold weather, hot springs and swirling mist as the audience move from the bedroom in their flat to the geometrical labyrinth of the Sundhollin Swimming Palace's changing room in true promenade style theatre, using the whole of the performance space as Y's story unfolds, guided by the other two 'actors', Steve Loader and Sinikka Kyllonen.

The car crash scene in which the audience had to wear their goggles with blurred lenses with the accident suggested by coloured lights and a startling soundscape (Adrienne Quartly) was a frightening play on the senses.

Essentially this is a play about memory, not only what we remember, but how we remember and in what order. Its concept is beguiling and challenging with inventive staging and clever use of multi-media projections (Paul Burgess) and atmospheric lighting by Katherine Williams.

Inventively directed by Carolina Valdes and Lucinka Eisler this was a moving, thought provoking experience.

Review by Robin Strapp (2010)



On **Black Stuff (2007 – 08):**

In Black Stuff, Shams have created a piece about the global oil and financial crisis that is human, hilarious and above all touching. It is a dark fairytale which turns the ordinary into the extraordinary through a seamless combination of music, story and performance. A cautionary tale which asks 'what price a full tank' and turns the answer on its head...

Shams are well versed in the working practices of French physical theatre teacher Jacques Lecoq and although Pasqual is the most directly linked to Lecoq's clowning practices the whole production is infused with the joy in playing and constant awareness of one another which also speaks of his work.

It is clear that every aspect of Black Stuff has been focused on in great detail, from the practical but evocative setting, to the soundscape created to fully realise the world just off of the playing space. This combined with the detailed and flawless performances of the cast leaves for a fantastically layered and rich production. Shams have taken oil and have revealed a rainbow sheen on top of it, that shimmers and makes you see the world differently. It is definitely one to catch.

« « « « Broadway Baby

A very entertaining and thought provoking piece of theatre. « « « « Fringereview

A well written comedy with a serious message. « « « « One4Review

On **The Garden (2003 – 07), Finalist Total Theatre Award 2006**

Donald Hutera in the Times, 31.08.06

With more than 1,800 shows vying for attention in 2006, the Edinburgh Fringe was nothing if not competitive. Many have doubtless sunk without a trace, while others are enjoying a longer, post-Fringe shelf life. Luckily, The Garden, a small gem from Britain's Shams theatre belongs in the latter category. It tours the country throughout September.

Written and performed by Jonathan Young, the company founder, the piece was last week shortlisted for a Total Theatre Award. These annual Fringe gongs are given to movement-based or image-led productions, in which text, if used at all, is one element of the entire theatrical package.

It's easy to see why Young's finely crafted solo qualified for consideration. Directed by Carolina Valdés, The Garden makes virtually seamless use of a number of devices to impart an elliptical narrative spanning several generations. These include telling video projections by Oogoo Maia and evocative pre-recorded music from a vocalist and cellist known as Mrs Pilgrim. More than mere window-dressing, the visuals and score enhance Young's efforts in multiple roles.

The linchpin is Jay, an aid worker who returns to Britain from Bosnia, c 1995, to clear out the Cornish home of his late great-great uncle Hugh. The two men's lives, it turns out, run along parallel tracks. Jay is suffering from a post-traumatic stress disorder similar to that which afflicted his uncle in the aftermath of the First World War. As Jay uncovers his uncle's troubled past, he himself gradually unravels.

Young slips smoothly between half a dozen characters, employing simple props and his own physical skills to suggest different people and settings. The elderly Beatrice, Hugh's erstwhile fiancée, is a particularly gentle-humoured creation. The script is an artful layering of history, memory, love, loss and healing, the latter sourced in a Victorian garden (inspired by Cornwall's Lost Gardens of Heligan) where Hugh and, much later, Jay convalesce. The shifting storytelling is perhaps complicated to a degree that muffles emotional impact. But this is still an affecting, worthwhile work that is both playful and poetic.

A quietly assured show, containing a superbly produced and acted script. Shams theatre confirm they are ones to watch <<<<<< Edinburghguide.com

*Atmospheric, innovative, intelligent visual feast of a one-man show. A beautiful, subtle, sublime performance featuring ingenious projection, crafty object manipulation, humour, charm, wit and skilled physical theatre... Wonderful. Don't miss. <<<<<<
Fringereview.co.uk*

Performer Jonathan Young is outstanding, the script is both funny and tragic in all the right places and the production is a lesson in how to use multimedia in theatre... a damn fine piece of work. <<<<<< Edmonton Vue, Canada

On *Sleeping Beauties* (2001-02):

The true story of an abortive nineteenth century expedition provides the inspiration for this one-man comedy. Performer Jonathan Young plays the survivor of an abandoned fleet as a grotesque clown made increasingly demented by loneliness and nullity, his sole companion a listless skeleton named Sebastian. Young is an engaging performer who, aided by the stark lighting and set design, fully conveys the limbo suffered by his character, with particular highlights being his deadpan exchanges with Sebastian. Though certain set pieces and jokes are permitted to drift endlessly like ships through an ice-flow, overall the piece is imaginative and grimly funny. <<<<< The List

*Over the years the Winnipeg Fringe has been privileged to see a number of excellent adult clowns, performers who use the clown persona to create characters and relate experiences that are personal and profound. Now Jonathan Young has brought us a clown, in *Sleeping Beauties*, that enquires into the character of a culture, and does it with a poignancy and intelligence equal to that achieved by his more personal colleagues.*

Sleeping Beauties is about the last days in the life of an arctic explorer who is lost and will never be found. (It is based on the infamous Franklin Expedition of the mid-nineteenth century which ended in the deaths of 130 men). The Captain is alone except for Sebastian, a skeleton with whom he has one-sided conversations. But the relationship between Sebastian and the Captain goes beyond the urbanities of upper-crust Britain: he is used for sex (in a nasty act of frigid necrophilia) and, more importantly, for food. You may think a clown play that includes bony sex and cannibalism is an unlikely vehicle for the expression



of emotion and subtlety, but you'd be wrong. Jonathan Young's performance as the doomed survivor is exceptional. There are moments of great rage and beauty in this play, like his heart-breaking dance macabre with Sebastian, and his scribbled letter to Molly, his wife back in England. Young's play gets at the complicated heart of the kind of national pride and adventurism that made men go off to discover an external world, when the necessary journey was inside, to discover themselves. The gift of this touching play is that it shows u that inside with such penetrating intelligence. Don't miss its strange, wide-eyed beauty.
Robert Enright, theatre critic for The Globe & Mail, Canada.