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Mark Fisher's Scottish Theatre Blog

News of latest features and reviews by theatre critic and journalist Mark Fisher

Tuesday, March 08, 2011

By the Seat of Your Pants, theatre review



Published in Northings

[By the Seat of Your Pants](#)

Howden Park Centre, Livingston, 4 March 2011, and touring

THERE'S an absurdist play by Eugene Ionesco called *The Chairs* in which two people fill a room with chairs for a conference of unseen people. *By the Seat of Your Pants* is like a junior version of this. Performed by three silent-movie style clowns, it is a warm-spirited piece of visual theatre for children, using wooden chairs as the starting point for a series of whimsical sketches. There are small chairs, tall chairs, folding chairs, fancy chairs and collapsing chairs, inspiring everything from romantic waltzes to raucous rounds of – what else? – musical chairs.

Performed by Edinburgh's Plutôt La Vie and slickly put together by director Magdalena Schamberger, it derives most of its gentle observational humour from the comedy of peer-group pressure. These three men – the genial Ian Cameron, the eager-to-please Tim Licata and the one-step-behind David Walshe – are forever trying to run with the pack. If two face in one direction, the other feels he should too. If one stands up, the others tell him to sit down. If one yawns and stretches, the others do their best to do the same – even if they don't understand why.

Inevitably, things don't go quite right. There's always a chair missing, a seat breaking or an actor getting the wrong end of the stick. This is right up a young audience's street. So much of growing up is about learning to socialise, to fit in with your friends and to be liked that it is a big laugh to see these men-children, whether by accident or design, singularly fail to achieve any of these things. For the older people in the audience, there are fewer laugh-out-loud moments, but the 70-minute piece (which feels on the long side for such deliberately slight material) sustains itself on innocence and charm.

Particularly strong is the score for clarinet, double bass and piano, specially recorded by composer Andrew Cruickshank. This is not just incidental music, but an integral part of the show, inspiring many of the visual gags, establishing the comedic pace and setting the tone of easy-going humour with its cool jazz rhythms and occasional classical digressions. The show would not be the same without it. (Pic: Douglas Robertson)

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About Me



Mark Fisher
 Edinburgh, Scotland,
 United Kingdom

I am an Edinburgh-based freelance journalist and critic specialising in theatre and the arts. My feature writing covers celebrity interviews, human interest stories, restaurant reviews, travel articles and opinion pieces, as well as theatre, music and art reviews. Publications I write for include *The Guardian*, *Scotland on Sunday*, the *Sunday Times*, *The Herald* and *The Scotsman*. From 2000-2003, I was the editor of *The List* magazine, Glasgow and Edinburgh's arts and events guide. See my [website](#) for more information and comprehensive Scottish theatre links.

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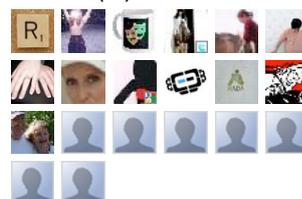
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