



Review: So, What's the Plan?



Lives of young people: Lucy Brindle, Sophie Precious Muringu and Harry Gascoigne

The Other Palace Theatre, Victoria, SW1
By Jessica Holt

East Finchley resident Harry Gascoigne has written a delightful musical play about life for three characters in their twenties who work together in a coffee shop. While on their break they explore their lives through song. They all have one ambition in common; they want to be famous and, in my view, this trio deserve to be.

In this small, welcoming studio theatre it sometimes felt we were in the West End. Some of the songs were so powerfully sung and with such sincerity the audience felt part of their angst. Musicals are not my passion, but I could not think of a better way to explore the frustrations of these young people.

Harry Gascoigne on the

keyboard explores with great humour the difficulties of dating apps and some of the bizarre episodes that can take place. Sophie Precious Muringu sings whilst playing guitar about the humiliating auditions she experiences.

Lucy Brindle sings about the trials of sharing a home

with strangers and falling in love with one of them. The strain of unrequited love and failure at auditions sends her back home, where the loss of independence alongside the constant pressure to continue her education drives her back to the coffee shop.

Harry successfully presents the difficulties many of our younger generation experience (low-paid work, inability to buy a home, how to connect with others) but he never does it in a self-pitying way. The piece is full of humour and comic moments which resonated with the audience of young people.

I spoke to Harry after the performance, and he was very pleased with the positive responses to his work. I expressed my view that the piece was enjoyable and succeeded in its artistic intentions but was there any potential for more dialogue? Both of us felt there was, but maybe that's a different play altogether.

Choir blends poetry and music in concert

Following its sell-out performance of J S Bach's Mass in B minor in March, popular local choir North London Chorus has announced that its next concert this month will feature two pieces the choir has never before performed in its 38-year history.

The climax of the concert is Edward Elgar's 1912 paean to art and artists for mezzo-soprano, chorus and orchestra, The Music Makers, in which stanzas from Arthur O'Shaughnessy's Ode are set to some of the composer's finest music.

The concert will open with Brahms' Schicksalslied (Song of Destiny), generally regarded as the finest of Brahms's shorter choral works. Completing the programme will be a popular work for solo voice and orchestra and a showcase for mezzo-soprano Clare Pressland. Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen (Songs of a Wayfarer) is a setting of four poems by composer Gustav Mahler.

All three pieces were originally composed for large orchestral forces, but the choir is delighted to introduce them into their repertoire thanks to the existence of skilled arrangements for chamber orchestra. The concert takes place on Saturday 12 July at 7.30pm at St James's Church, Muswell Hill, N10. Tickets are available at northlondonchorus.org/tickets.



Isolation: Aidan Casey and Ella Dorman-Gajic

Review: Shelley at Upstairs at the Gatehouse, Highgate

By Jessica Holt

This new play written by Richard Bradbury blends the past and the present by encouraging us to link the state's surveillance of poet Shelley by the then Home Secretary, Lord Sidmouth with the current surveillance of our society.

This is achieved with the use of a TV monitor centre stage from which Lord Sidmouth, played by Charlie Coldfield, lectures us on the evils of radicalism as perpetrated by Shelley. The play focuses on this rather than Shelley's wonderful poetry.

Shelley played by Aidan Casey is somewhat overshadowed by the two women in his life, his equally radical first wife Harriet played by Ella Dorman-Gajic and their friend Elizabeth Hitchener played by Maureen Casey.

The play begins with the

Shelleys escaping from Ireland where their political views are unacceptable to the British Government. But it is in Ireland where he forms his ideas on justice, on the freedom of the individual and the right to oppose oppressive regimes. They return to England and live in hiding in Lynmouth where the strain on their relationship placed on them by constant surveillance eventually leads to Shelley's second marriage to Mary and living abroad.

The set and sound effects successfully create the isolation of the couple's seaside existence. The moments when Shelley reads some of his poetry remind us of his genius alongside other poets and his friends Keats and Byron. Shelley's poem *The Mask of Anarchy* is a powerful attack on Lord Sidmouth and the Establishment he represents but doesn't compensate for Shelley's unfulfilled life and tragic death.

RICKY SAVAGE... THE VOICE OF IRRESPONSIBILITY

God only knows

The early 1960s was when the American dream became reality. There was a new, young president in John F Kennedy, wars had been won and teenagers were starting to rule the world. Middle America had survived rock'n'roll, Elvis was in the army and the time was right for something new. And it could only come from one place, California.

This was the land of sun, sand and surf, complete with long hot summers when high school kids could spend their time at the beach, where all the boys were clean-cut and handsome in a parentally approved way and the girls were pretty, blonde and lived in bikinis. This was the time of surfing, cars and Coca Cola. And it had the music to match.

I'm not sure where it started, maybe with Jan and Dean, but I know where it went and that's The Beach Boys. Why? Because Brian Wilson was a genius. Together with his brothers, a cousin and a friend he hit the spot with a series of surf anthems like *Surfer Girl*, *California Girls* and *Surfer USA*, songs that captured a time. They meant as much to American kids as The Beatles did to Brits. They were the sound of an endless summer.

Deaf in one ear and scared of the ocean, Brian was not a surfer boy. Instead, he was the man who wrote the songs, created the harmonies that gave them their sound. For about five years in the mid-60s, California boys and girls had a soundtrack that was 'Fun, Fun, Fun' whether you dreamed of 'Barbara Ann' or not.

The pressure to deliver the next song and the constant touring was something Brian found a bit much. He stopped touring in 1964 when his first round of mental health problems stepped in. He was diagnosed as having schizoaffective disorder and mild bi-polar disorder, so while the band hit the road he stayed at home and created masterpieces.

The masterpiece was *Pet Sounds* and the standout track was *Good Vibrations* with its swirling arrangement and close harmonies that took pop music a step further and left Paul McCartney lost for words. The follow-up LP *Smile* never happened and as the 1970s began, Brian retreated. Maybe this was due to his mental health, maybe it was due to the LSD and cocaine, but the world had moved on and left California behind.

But eventually he came back, clean and together. He spent the first 20 years of this century touring with a band of excellent musicians, recreating the sound that had made him. He even finally got *Smile* finished. In 2004 he played the Legends slot at Glastonbury to a crowd so packed that I guess there were more people there to watch him than the headline acts. Hell, there were even dudes crowd surfing, on surfboards. God only knows where we would have been without him.

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