



First Night Reviews

streetZ ★★★★★

North West Theatre Arts Company

*Directed by Prab Singh, Musical Direction Bethany Singh,
Choreography Katie Gough.*

NWTAC Theatre, Manchester: 6th – 10th March 2018.

With a book by Prab Singh, music by Ross Johnson and lyrics by Prab Singh and Holly Younge, this was a bit more than just another new piece of musical theatre; a lot more to be honest.

With a market place in which new British repertoire is simply not given the space or the opportunity (IMHO) to be given a home audience, it was with a sense of "about time" that I eventually got to see *streetZ*. And having heard so much about it, all expectations were met.

It is easy with a new piece for a Reviewer to take the cop-out route and compare it to other shows to make it easier to categorise. But this new musical fought that approach. If you wanted to play 'comparison bingo', it was *Corrie-Shameless-Matilda-Blood Brothers-Our House*; but in a breath it had you crossing them all out. The reason simply, was that it felt original, it sounded original and it think it was original. It defied being pigeonholed or accused of being formulaic. At times it was more a play than a musical, but at its core, it was storytelling at its best. And the writers (thankfully) ensured that the piece was not a collection of clichés and stereotypes.

As a true ensemble piece, the large cast and numerous contemporary storylines of ordinary Manchester families and allegiances, wove together and teased apart with a range of themes and issues which have, or could, belong to any one of us. As a Mancunian, it was a more than familiar narrative for me. The language, the humour, the personalities were people you had shared a lifetime with. And that, I guess, was the heart of the success of it as a piece of theatre: the actors and the audience owned the story because it was theirs **and** ours. In a nutshell then, it was simply a story of Manchester life: hopes fear, aspirations, but above all, hope.

It didn't feel like a piece of manufactured theatre as it ebbed and flowed, moved with ease and held the attention - that despite having a 90 minute first half.

To be honest, it was a breath of fresh theatrical air; unpretentious, painfully honest, cuttngly witty at times, but above all, true to itself and the people it represented. The characters were full-formed both in writing and playing and this was some feat for such a young cast and moreover, of such a huge age-range to deliver. But the age-range became a irrelevance as the maturity of the playing and the ease in which they handled the (at times, very adult) themes, all of which made for absorbing theatre.

The designers and creatives had devised an ingenious set solution which ensured the staging practicalities flowed with the narrative and the space was (I felt) perfect for the piece.

It would be easy to list all the cast and attach superlatives to them, but as a true ensemble piece, it would be disingenuous to single individuals out. There were many outstanding and intimate moments which touched all emotional bases, but every single performer rose to the challenge of *streetZ* and justified their place within it.

Wearing another hat, I honestly think it has commercial legs and it would be fascinating to see what a pro team/dramaturg would do with it to get it ready for a pro stage. I think it would sit well on one...and it deserves the chance.

Martin Paul Roche – First Night Reviews

Theatre writer, Reviewer, Acquisitions Agent and Drama Festival Adjudicator

www.martinpaulroche.com