



Review of The Lodger, a black comedy by Paul Birtill



"The Lodger moves into Hampstead"

by Andy Moseley for remotegoat on 10/08/12

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A misanthropic 40 year-old poet who has never had a 'proper' job, is plagued by acne, and has only had sex three times in his entire life - not your usual leading man material, but in Paul Birtill's black comedy it makes perfect sense. The play, charts the transformation of Steven, the aforesaid poet, after he takes in his first lodger, law student Clare, and the antagonism and antipathy between them melts away within the walls of a council flat and on the open fields of Hampstead Heath.

The course of Steven's life, let alone the course of true love, will never run smoothly of course, and the path to happiness is littered with obstacles including downstairs neighbour Basil, for whom Steven's TV is a shared resource whether or not Steven is in, Stephen's father, who has loved him in the way a father shouldn't, and Nick, Clare's real-man boyfriend, who is as far removed from Steven as it's possible to be.

Birtill writes about dysfunctional people and does not dress up their hopes and failures for glossy consumption. The characters speak with an uncensored honesty and the script is peppered with fantastic one-liners that sum up the lives of the people that speak them. Steven's description of himself as having the strength of a woman with anaemia is excellent because it is accurate and brutally honest as well as self deprecating and funny. Likewise, when he talks about his now deceased cat sucking his nipples, and describes it as the best sex he's had, you laugh but know that he's probably not lying. The wider reflections on life and death throughout the play also strike home with a bitter sweet accuracy. Birtill's never tries to sugar-coat life with even a final line that will leave romantics having to admit a likely truth.

Cameron Harris gives a strong performance as Steven, straddling the right side of the line between self awareness and self pity, and Amy Brangwyn as Clare convinces as the law student who gradually sees beyond the acne and depression to recognise Steven as someone with much to offer.

Occasionally the play misses a beat. Jake the upstairs neighbour with an endless supply of knock off goods, did not convince as a character and a few of the shorter scenes seemed as if they were there to fill the gap between costume changes rather than because they added anything to the script, but at the same time it was good to see a play with the confidence to include or continue scenes beyond the point where they were essential to story development, simply because they were funny.

The Lodger takes humdrum and unadventurous lives and turns them into something that holds an audience's interest for almost ninety minutes with ease. The outcome is inevitable, but that doesn't matter when the journey to get there is as well observed and well written as this.

Event Venues & Times

Showing until 26/08/12 [Pentameters Theatre](#) | above The Horseshoe pub, entrance in Oriel Place, 28 Heath Street, London, NW3 6TE

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