

Rob Gemmell reviews In Pursuit Of Oblivion by The Lion Tamers Theatre Company at the Darwen Library Theatre.

In Pursuit Of Oblivion - Darwen Library Theatre, Friday April 5th 2013

Written by: Robert Pegg

Directed by: Karl Barnsley

"People aren't interested in the truth, they just want something to believe."

The Lion Tamers Theatre Company is a brand new company set up to promote and tour new plays around the North West. I was fortunate enough to enjoy their first production, "In Pursuit of Oblivion" written by Manchester based writer Robert Pegg.

In Pursuit Of Oblivion tells the story of Martin who wakes in a hospital bed after an attempt to take his own life. Martin shares his hospital room with Billy, an older, more experienced and more cynical man with a nihilistic view of the world.

Martin's realisation of the seriousness of his actions play on him during the first Act when he begins to worry about how those around him will feel. Whether the decision to turn to suicide was real or a cry for help, we don't know. What we do realise though towards the end of the Act is the real reason why he did it when we are introduced to girlfriend or former girlfriend, Vicky.

The second Act of the play is about the acceptance of decisions that are made for us and not necessarily the decisions that we want to take, but have no choice. It is about dealing with love, dealing with life and making the most of the time that we do have and not throwing it away. Billy perseveres with his aggressive disparagement of life. In one of the plays many poignant moments we see the real reason why Billy holds the views that he does and why he judges the world and those who don't take advantage of life.

Any topic that deals with the serious theme of suicide has to be treated carefully and in Pegg's script the balance is perfect. The scale between comedy and drama has been addressed with such profession that we feel comfortable being in its presence. The script is well crafted and topical with references to the Greek economy, Sky Plus and the continued domination of social media website Facebook replacing physical speech as the primary form of communication.

The play is made up of clever monologues that can have us smiling at one moment and on the verge of tears the next. The topics of love and loss can be related to by many of us and are thought provoking. Do we really live our lives the way we should live them? Billy's ferocious outbursts can sometimes just be the ramblings of a man who feels he hasn't been dealt a fair hand in life, but there are times you simply have to nod and agree with him.

The superiority of this script has been blessed with a fine cast of actors and a director who really bring the story to life. There are opportunities throughout the play for the actors to really steal the show, but Karl Barnsley's outstanding direction enables each of the cast to have their moment with the use of clever lighting and they all take the opportunity to shine.

Joel Parry puts in an extremely professional performance as Martin alongside the talented Ian Ralph who plays the cynical, yet loveable Billy. Nick Whymer portrays the role of the religious Bernard with a soft, warm approach that has a subtle deftness. The balance of characters works really well with all three of them.

We are briefly introduced to Emma McMorrow as Nurse Lizzie in the first Act and her character really shines through in the second as she acquires more of the stage. Christine Clare completes the cast as Vicky, the former girlfriend of Martin who portrays the role well. Her development of character in such a short space of time is sincere in a performance of such proficient attitude.

I was privileged to be able to meet both director Karl Barnsley and writer Robert Pegg before the performance and they both shared the same nervous, excited apprehension. They needn't have worried about being nervous. If this is just the first performance from the group then the future is certainly bright for them.

For more information on the Lion Tamers Theatre Company, you can visit their website here – www.theliontamerstheatre.co.uk **@TheLionTamers**

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