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Dance grippingly explores world of social outsiders

JOHN
National Theatre
★★★★☆

Lloyd Newson's DV8 company takes a big risk in fusing two opposing elements – metaphorical movement and verbatim drama – but it pays off with gripping new work JOHN.

DV8, which previously tackled Islamic fundamentalism and homophobia, here confronts the harrowing life of a social outsider, the eponymous John (Hannes Langolf), who experiences everything from domestic violence and addiction to prison and homelessness.

Newson originally planned to draw on interviews with 50 men, but John's extraordinary story demanded the spotlight. It's a beneficial adjustment, with potentially haranguing criticism of broken systems and society's reduced welfare role, plus general musing on intimacy, converted into an exquisitely personal journey. Issues are not raised, but literally embodied.

Langolf's restrained, wry delivery allows no histrionics or self-pity, and is all the more moving for the refusal to sentimentalise. Critically, he finds a variety of tones within John's tale: pain leavened by dark humour, and each source of grief or frustration crisply distinct.

He physicalises addiction as a constant ripple through his lean frame, twisting him into tortuous positions.

The supporting dancers, who workshoped stylised movement while listening to interview transcripts on their iPods, deliver sharp characterisation for even the most minor player. Andi Xhuma's shifting, coiling Polish absconder is mesmerising, Garth Johnson offers a comic tour de



■ Hannes Langolf in the title role

Picture: Hugo Glendinning

force as a twirling tour guide, and Ian Garside produces sonorous speech and powerful counterbalanced partnering.

There's excellent, equally detailed support from Gareth Fry's sound design and Anna Fleischle's revolving set.

JOHN loses focus during the second half, with the title charac-

ter receding in favour of a lengthy gay sauna rundown. It's frequently witty and enlightening, but impaired by following such intense narrative. Yet when John's fight for survival and belief in redemption shine through, it's truly electrifying viewing.

Until January 13.

Marianka Swain



■ Lillie Flynn, John Dagleish and George Maguire

Picture: Kevin Cummins

West End transfer shows homage to The Kinks has really got us...

SUNNY AFTERNOON
Harold Pinter Theatre
★★★★☆

They exploded onto the scene in the '60's and far from ageing, The Kink's music has inspired others and is as cool and socially relevant today.

This rock 'n' roll homage to Muswell Hill's finest transfers to the West End after a sell-out run at Hampstead Theatre and tells the story of Ray and Dave Davies' rise to fame through their own incredible music.

From humble beginnings through turbulent times in America, the working class brothers and friends Mick Avory and Peter Quaipe are bought resoundingly to life under Joe Penhall's well-turned book and Edward Hall's confident direction.

A whirlwind tour of 1960's Britain, greedy music managers, relentless touring, flirting, infighting and humour cover familiar rockumentary territory.

The musical arrangements are outstanding, be it an early metal sound in *You Really Got Me*, a beautiful acoustic rendition of

Days, or celebratory fanfare that couples winning the 1966 World Cup with *Sunny Afternoon* at number one in the charts, as red white and blue confetti fall from the gods.

John Dagleish captures the tortured genius of Ray Davies, his vulnerability and powerful social conscience so resonant in his tunes. George Maguire is brilliant as the somewhat unhinged Dave, with his penchant for violence and cross dressing – in one scene swinging from a chandelier wearing a pink negligee with a gun in his pants.

Historical references abound as do musical jokes. Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones was, they say, far too normal and well-adjusted to be in their band. Overall it's a rich and rewarding experience but towards the end there's an uncharacteristic moment of sentimentality between Ray and the band which felt a song too far. But the audience is soon back on its feet for a rousing gig-style finale rejoicing in tunes that continue to warm the soul. Until further notice.

Nathalie Raffray

One woman's German tale is five star performance

MAN TO MAN
Park Theatre
★★★★☆

Man To Man is an extraordinary theatrical experience: one woman and 75 minutes of intense emotional onslaught.

As we mark the 25th anniversary of the coming down of the Berlin Wall, it offers an impressionistic overview of Germany.

The play ranges from the hyperinflation and depression of the 1920s, the rise of Hitler in 1933, the war and horrors of arbitrary arrest and imprisonment, the peace, partition, the economic miracle of the 50s, and, finally, the reunited Fatherland in 1989.

It's told from the perspective of a woman with an extraordinary story. Her husband, Max Gericke is a crane driver for a large engineering company.

He has cancer but drags himself into work each day despite the agony of the tumour – jobs are

hard to get and harder to keep. The description of his death is harrowing.

His wife, not so much played by but lived by the amazing Tricia Kelly, decides to impersonate him and continue in his job.

The alternative is starvation. Luckily, she wryly observes "Crane drivers don't talk much to other workers" so the chances of discovery are reduced.

Cut

Tricia has her hair cut to look like the Max of the 1930s – shaven down one side and floppy on the other. She wears no makeup, moves, scratches and belches like a man, drinks and swears like ... a crane driver. Her performance is extraordinarily physical and immersive.

War comes and the nightmare of her deception re-emerges.

What if he/she is called up and has to have a medical?

And like Jews, communists and gays, he/she is petrified of the

knock on the door, of inadvertently giving away the truth and being found out.

Playwright Manfred Karge has penned a new scene written after the Wall came down.

Director Tilly Branson, travelling to Berlin to research an earlier production, had met Karge and his inspiration led her to assemble a terrific team of set, lighting and sound designers who have delivered a simple but impressive backdrop, a well chosen soundtrack and lighting that adds no distracts.

The danger is that this kind of narrative can descend into remorselessly bleak territory that repels the audience.

But there are genuinely funny moments of jet black humour and a central performance that's absolutely compelling.

Kelly's portrait of a woman whose categorical imperative is simple survival will stay with me for a very long time.

David Winskill



■ Tricia Kelly gives a physical and immersive performance Picture: Mike Kwansniak