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Festival Connect - Saying just don't make it so in The Coming Storm

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The Coming Storm
Forced Entertainment

The Coming Storm by Forced Theatre

Rating: ★★★★★

When a property is described as “rustic, with skylight, has potential,” it often turns out to be the shell of a cottage in the middle of nowhere minus a roof. When it comes to Forced Entertainment’s latest production *The Coming Storm*, directed by Tim Etchells, there’s something of that same discrepancy between how the thing is described and what it actually is. Forced Entertainment, at the forefront of British avant-garde theatre since the 1980’s, are often described as producing ground breaking and innovative theatre. *The Coming Storm*, though charming, entertaining and quirky at times, showed very little evidence of either for the most part.

At either side of the stage a clothes rail stands. Some chairs, a piano, a drum kit, a guitar, some branches and a wind machine are gathered to the sides and the rear. Six cast members amble

onstage and one begins a long lecture to the audience on the aspects of a good story, where good means popular. A cast member cuts them off and takes the microphone in order to tell their story directly to the audience instead until eventually another cast member cuts them off, takes the microphone to tell a different story...and on and on it goes. This was the structure around which everything else was built. With performers often instructing the audience to keep their focus on them as the centre of audience attention, periphery vision was called into play to catch some hilarious dances, endless costume changes, a failed suicide attempt and some clever musical moments spread over an hour and forty five minutes. Not unusual for Forced Entertainment whose shows often have a much longer duration as they attempt to explore just who's forcing whom?

Like listening to the same song over and over, what was initially interesting soon lost its appeal because of the endless repetition. It's not that this wasn't an interesting idea to begin with; it just wasn't that interesting an idea and not one that could sustain itself. It might be argued that that was part of the whole point of *The Coming Storm*. It might also be argued that when a company builds a show on improvisation a richer, deeper and broader variety of ideas, investigations and interpretations is to be expected. When it asked questions like "does story cheapen the memory with sentiment and nostalgia?" and opened up the idea of optimistic melancholy, there was a sense that something interesting was about to happen. But instead *The Coming Storm* shot off on another tangent and returned to switching from one person to the next as each told their next so-so story.

In the post-show discussion performers Robin Arthur, Phil Hayes, Richard Lowdon, Claire Marshall, Cathy Naden and Terry O'Connor each spoke charmingly and eloquently on the rationale behind their show and of Forced Entertainment's aesthetic. Yet talk of theatre as being there while you're there could equally be applied to companies like Paperdolls, Pony Dance, Will Fredd, Anu Productions, artists like Miet Warlop and shows like White Rabbit, Red Rabbit, all of which subvert and push at the boundaries of story-telling and theatre to great effect. Though entertaining, clever and funny on occasion, philosophically, theatrically and aesthetically *The Coming Storm* could, and should have yielded so much more.

The Coming Storm runs at The Samuel Beckett Theatre until October 13. Doors open 7.30 p.m., with a Matinee at 2.30 p.m. Tickets €25.00 - €30.00



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