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# Dispatches from The Fringe - Bereavement is song, stage and performer

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Bereavement: the Musical  
*Theatre Society with Pembroke Players and CUADC*

## Bereavement: the Musical

Rating: ★★★★★

From the outset *Bereavement: the Musical* gets back to basics while playfully subverting the musical theatre genre. For its curtain-raising, big opening number an undertaker ambles lazily across stage and slowly draws back the silver, tinsel curtains allowing the mourners to step through. Six mourners take center stage as the undertaker retires to the piano to accompany them on their opening number, which begins with the cast still standing in semi darkness.

All of which makes you realize that sometimes it's important to split hairs and read the small print. In doing so, the first thing you discover is that *Bereavement: the Musical* is not an actual musical. It's a musical song-cycle and the distinction is crucial. As it stands this variations-on-a-single-theme collection of songs just hasn't enough flesh and bone to it to be a true, stand-alone musical. As a musical song-cycle however, or basis from which a musical may later evolve, *Bereavement: The Musical* is incredibly entertaining, hugely enjoyable, both brave and visionary with the potential to be an outstanding and original piece of musical theatre.

Feeling much like a revue at times, *Bereavement: the Musical* is dominated by solos, has very little

dance, and what dance there is is quite weak. Sparsely peppered with dialogue, with barely a story and no more than sketches of characters to hang your affections on, it also fails to pull you in completely on an emotional level. What story and characters there were seemed to focus on the deaths of parents. Joey Akubeze played a single father coming to terms with the death of his child's mother. James Lanaghan, as a young man, Rosie Brown, a corporate financier and Will Karani as a teenager, all mourned their respective mothers. Jess Peet, a good girl going bad, mourned the death of her father. It's a credit to its young and talented cast that they created such textured and layered performances with so little to work with beyond their amazing songs.

But *Bereavement: the Musical* is really about the music and writers Jeff Carpenter and Mairin O'Hagan have crafted some outstanding, first-rate, knock your socks off songs. Throughout they seem more at home with comedy than pathos and the hilarious, "I Don't Need Therapy," sung brilliantly by the riveting Rosie Brown, and the show stealing, "Is It Right To Have A Wank When Your Mum's Dead?" wonderfully delivered by Will Karani, were two stand out numbers. The ensemble number "Believe in Better" provided an excellent and natural big finish, and the decision to epilogue this with an unoriginal tribute to Cabaret weakened an otherwise excellent ending.

*Bereavement: the Musical* is a brave and creative attempt to return to the basics of the genre. It offers musical theatre, plain and simple, without any attempt at spectacle. It demands of itself songs and performances that can stand onstage, alone, without costume, spectacle or effect to hide behind. *Bereavement: the Musical* doesn't sparkle with a million footlights, but with its raw, nerve racking simplicity of song, stage and performer, it dazzles far brighter than many shows that do.

*Bereavement:the Musical* plays daily until August 27th at C-venues C. Doors open at 6.40 p.m. Tickets are £11.50



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