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Dispatches from The Fringe - A youthful Tissue is a towering success

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Tissue
Muchmuchmore Theatre Co

Tissue

Rating: ★★★★★

In Muchmuchmore Theatre Company's production of Louise Page's, 1978 play *Tissue*, a talented young ensemble focus on the body as a physical instrument for communicating through performance. The result is a visual and theatrical feast stunning in its inventiveness and simplicity.

In *Tissue*, Sally Bacon discovers she has breast cancer. Terrifically played by Kirsty Jackson, Sally is dressed in white, her body covered in pencil markings reminiscent of someone about to undergo surgery. As the show begins Sally is surrounded by a chorus comprised of nine cast members contrastingly dressed in red. Following her admission of her condition, Sally's fears are ridiculed, dismissed, treated with indifference and ultimately she is left isolated among the bodies that surround her. In what follows a fractured narrative fluidly moves the action forward and backward through time to tell Sally's complex story.

Excellent direction by Andy Newman ensures that the shifts between past and present, scene and exposition occur without the pace slackening too much. What's more, Newman manages to achieve that perfect balance between remaining true to Sally's narrative while opening up the

plays subtler depths. Through clever use of the chorus to create physical images which inform and support the plays themes, Sally's story is elevated beyond the autobiographical as she comes to represent a kind of Everywoman. This allows the actors truly explore the issues at the heart of *Tissue*. Namely, a woman's relationship with her body, herself, her breasts, the other people in her life and her fears at how she is perceived and represented.

Newman elicits extraordinary performances from this young cast. While listed in the program merely as ensemble, there were some notable performances worthy of mention created by the actresses who played Sally's childhood friend Zoe, Sally's mother and her nurse. But all were outstanding and while they are unattributed to specific roles in the programme, Phil Booth, Rachel Clifford, Byrony Davies, Max Harrison, Jenny Mather, Hanna Rankin, Alex Sherwood, Carolyn Singleton and Olivia Roberts fully deserve individual mention.

There is not an ounce of fat in these performances and Newman's attention to detail left nothing to chance here. But there were a few issues beyond the opening night jitters. Lighting was problematic at times, either blinding the audience or failing to properly illuminate an actor or scene. While the musical score was adequate for the most part, it was rarely up to the standard of performance and the soundscape was often jarring, disrupting rather than contributing to the mood and atmosphere created onstage and distracting from some incredible performances.

In *Tissue* Muchmuchmore achieve much, much more than just putting the physical back in theatre. They have created something that is both individual in its execution yet true to *Tissue's* story, its characters, its themes and its vitally important message: women get your breasts checked. Now.

And breasts or no, check out *Tissue*. It is mesmerising, magical and memorable .

Tissue plays daily at The Bedlam Theatre until August 25th. Doors open at 6.25 p.m. Tickets are £5.00 - £6.00



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