



URBAN HIMS

The sweet and lyrical theatrical CV of Chris Goode is about to take a darker twist. David Kettle explores the themes behind his tale of violence and complicity

I'm in the kind of mood where I'm lobbing a brick through the window and running off, and I'm interested in what people do with the mess I've left behind.' It's hardly the kind of wanton act of violence we might expect from writer, director and actor Chris Goode. After all, he's been revered for a succession of gentle, lyrical, sweetly poignant Fringe shows over the past few years (think *Monkey Bars*, *The Adventures of Wound Man and Shirley*, *Hippo World Guest Book*, *Kiss of Life*). But then his new solo Fringe offering is a radically different beast.

Men in the Cities takes as its trigger two acts of shocking violence: the (fictional) suicide of a young gay man, and the real-life murder of Lee Rigby in Woolwich last summer. From there, Goode explodes his narrative into microscopic and intentionally bewildering detail. 'You meet lots and lots of different characters; the piece is built out of dozens of tiny thumbnail portraits of people, and then we follow about half a dozen of them in more depth.'

These include everyone from a working-class man nearing retirement who no longer knows what to believe, to a ten-year-old obsessed with punk rock. 'Obviously that's partly saying something about how it seems to me we live and relate to each other now; and the ways we organise society to promote a vision of ourselves as atomised, where the idea of us as individuals is paramount.'



It's a new way of writing for Goode ('it goes slightly against my natural instinct to write in long, lyrical arcs') and so are its themes of complicity, anger and harm. 'But in a sense, *Men in the Cities*' anger comes from a kind of optimism,' he says, 'of wanting us to be able to imagine living better. I think it's bringing out my own punk side a little bit, which is not something I've unleashed for a while.'

When we speak, Goode is deep in the writing process and reluctant to be drawn further on specific storylines. 'On the surface, it's about the damage we do to ourselves by requiring

ourselves to live in a certain way,' he says, accepting that he'll be dealing with some tough issues. 'It's a piece that's about violence, but I hope that in itself it's not a violent piece. I think there's space in the show for confronting difficult stuff, but I hope it won't be me and the audience eyeballing each other. And the Traverse has a reputation for being a place where difficult things can be talked about.'

What does he imagine the audience will take away from the show? 'In a way I'm interested in the energy from refusing to answer that question, and in trying to make something through a burst of energy, anger and resistance, just to see what the fallout might be.'

Putting the show together has been a far from comfortable experience for Goode. 'It has a kind of volatility that's really exciting, but which makes me pretty nervous when I sit down at my desk to start writing. I can't touch this stuff for more than an hour or two without feeling I need to go for a walk. But I have a feeling that the writing is going to be the easy bit; standing on stage, having to say these words night after night, that's a whole other thing I'm trying not to think about right now.'

Men in the Cities, Traverse Theatre, Cambridge Street, 0131 228 1404, 1-24 Aug (not 4, 11, 18), various times, £18 (£8-£13). Preview 31 Jul, 8.30pm, £12 (£7).