



RICHARD DAVENPORT

MONKEY BARS

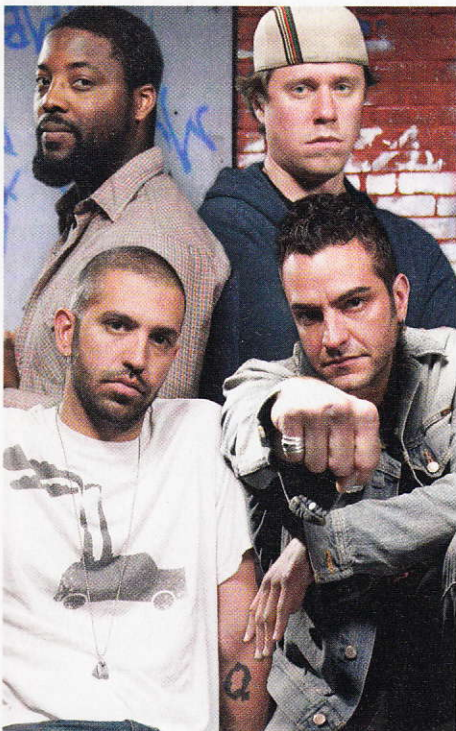
Kids say the profoundest things ●●●●●

'Sometimes adults don't really listen to children,' suggests the actor playing dialogue artist Karl James at the start of Chris Goode's masterful new verbatim play. And that's exactly what this astonishing piece seems to be telling us – that there's so much we can learn from opening our ears to what kids are saying. About ourselves as adults, and how we treat children and each other; about big issues like war and poverty; and about Lily Allen and what happens to bubblegum creatures in hot tubs.

It's the sheer range of subject matter, tone and insight that makes *Monkey Bars* so remarkable. Based on conversations with children aged eight-to-eleven in the London area, carried out by Karl James (who appears throughout the work), the twist is that the kids' lines are delivered by adult actors, faithfully and with no hint of condescension. There's humour, of course, in the simple incongruity of childish observations coming from straight-faced grown-ups, but that's just the start of it. Goode (who directs as well as compiling and editing the text) also creates adult situations for some of the conversations, to often horribly telling effect. An exchange about monsters takes place in a hilariously surreal job interview; two boys worrying about rising crime levels find themselves in a political debate. In a breathtakingly elegant yet ruthlessly effective way, Goode holds up a mirror to our own adult morals and social conventions. Sometimes, though, it's the children's raw words, delivered unadorned, that are enough – pride at being the only girl to play rugby, for instance, or a haiku-like memory of falling off a bike.

The performances from the six-strong cast are pitch-perfect: the actors clearly relish the rich dialogue but never stray into sentimentality. And Naomi Dawson's effective stage design makes the most of simple glowing cubes and a single microphone. This is a major achievement from regular Fringe visitor Goode, by turns heartbreaking and hilarious, and often overwhelming. After it, you'll never hear children in the same way again. (David Kettle)

■ *Traverse Theatre, 228 1404, until 26 Aug, times vary, £17-£19 (£12-£14).*



OTHELLO - THE REMIX

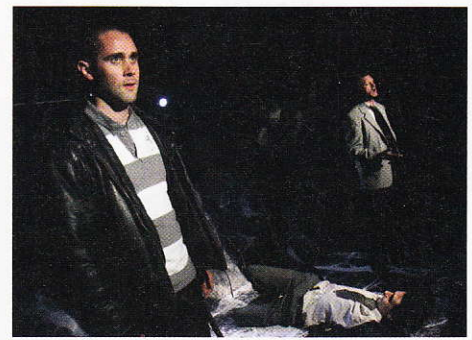
Energetic reimagining of the Moor of Venice ●●●●●

The third of Chicago Shakespeare Theater's highly successful adaptations of the bard – following *The Bomb-itty of Errors* and *Funk It Up About Nothing* in recent years – *Othello: the Remix* reimagines the Moor of Venice as an American rap god, recently married to the angelic (but never seen) Desdemona, and struggling against the machinations of disgruntled band member Iago.

It's the virtuoso rapping and hot moves from the four remarkable performers that steal the show, and it all makes perfect sense – their dense, clever rap is the ideal parallel for the poetry of the original (although Shakespeare might not have mentioned crack pipes and bitches).

Performer JQ has a fine line in characterisation, embodying a geeky Roderigo and a splendidly needy Bianca (Iago's other half), and Jackson Doran is wonderfully wide-eyed and gullible as Cassio, another who falls into Iago's web. There are a few moments that jar – having a scene played for laughs immediately after the chillingly presented murder of Desdemona strikes a strange note, and some of the characters are sketched in very briefly. But in a show of this much energy, creativity and sheer panache, it hardly matters. (David Kettle)

■ *Pleasance Courtyard, 556 6550, until 27 Aug (not 21), 1.55pm, £12.50-£15 (£10-£12.50).*



RAINBOW

Overwrought trio of monologues ●●●●●

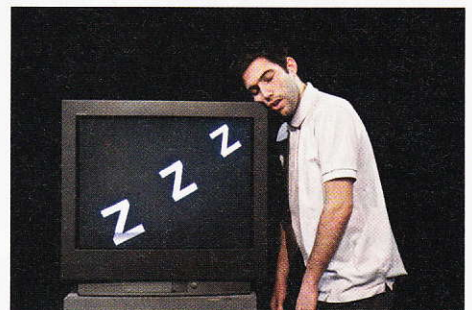
Playwright Emily Jenkins can't resist a flourish. In *Rainbow*, three vaguely interlinked monologues, barely a noun goes unadorned and awkward similes come thick and fast. Like ill-educated cheetahs.

If someone sweats, it's 'like a horny pig'. Breasts are 'like erupting molehills'. Someone turns red 'like the girl in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*,' presumably Violet Beauregarde, who morphs into a blueberry.

Irritating though this is, *Rainbow's* real flaw is in not revealing its purposes. Its three characters – a debt-collector with a fondness for Radio 4, a bullied schoolboy seeking a safe-space and a seedy teacher trying his luck with a pupil – have too little in common for thematic resonance. As their respective stories skim each other's edges, so that characters and locations recur, the connections and echos are too slight for *Rainbow* to add up to more than the sum of its parts.

Jenkins directs this clunky production herself and too often her cast play the surface emotions before telling the story, making *Rainbow* seem overwrought as well as overwritten. (Matt Trueman)

■ *Zoo Southside, 662 6892, until 27 Aug, 4.45pm, £9 (£7).*



PERLE

Gem of a show exploring grief and loss ●●●●●

Perle shows a life on pause. A man sits in front of a television, feeding it one VHS tape after another. At first he seems like any other screen-junkie, swiping the big wide world for the small screen, but gradually an unshakeable grief reveals itself. Square-eyes, it seems, don't shed so many tears.

Based on an anonymous 14th century poem, *Dancing Brick's* live-cartoon is a duet between man and machine. Thomas Eccleshare remains silent, too brittle to speak. His words appear in onscreen speech bubbles. Elsewhere, he reaches behind to pick up a line-drawn phone in Serge Seidnitz's animation or make himself a 2D sandwich. Still hungry afterwards, he simply rewinds the tape with an impish smile. *Perle* won't show you grief in a new light; in fact, it takes a superbly delicate, upbeat performance from Eccleshare to stave off sentimentality. Instead, it's a perfectly-formed miniature, slight but exquisite. The metaphor of television unlocks the original: home-movies stand in for memories and the world fades to black and white. In short, *Perle's* a gem. (Matt Trueman)

■ *Assembly Roxy, 623 3030, until 26 Aug, 1.45, £9-£10 (£8-£9).*