

THE PRIZE

Not quite living the Olympic dream ●●●●●

Gold and silver are mere split seconds apart. There's just as little between Olympians and Paralympians: a ladder that slips; a bout of meningitis; an IED underfoot. Life may not be fair, but – as the London 2012 hopefuls and former medallists featured in Steve Gilroy and Richard Stockwell's verbatim piece demonstrate – it is what you make of it.

Certainly, *The Prize* gives a real flavour of the thrill of competition and the sacrifice of training, but there's little here that you can't get from BBC coverage. A fluid staging keeps it above Creature Comforts and different speakers are really well juxtaposed, but there's too little overarching structure for any sort of contention. Golden-ageist ideas about honourable amateurism and concerns for British sport post-2012 aren't convincingly backed up. As such, it's hard to get overly excited about *The Prize* – a case of nothing ventured, nothing gained. Nonetheless, Gilroy's production is the most mature and unproblematic handling of disability, gender and race I've seen on a UK stage. Gilroy shows us the people, never the bodies – and that alone is medal-worthy. (Matt Trueman)

■ *Underbelly Bristo Square*, 0844 545 8252, until 26 Aug, 2.50pm, £11–£12 (£10–£11).

**NOLA**

Underwhelming take on fascinating subject ●●●●●

Theatre company Look Left Look Right scored two hits last year with innovative interactive pieces – *You Once Said Yes* and *You Wouldn't Know Him*, *He Lives In Texas* – and their offering this year is a verbatim documentary piece about the 2010 BP oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. They've travelled to the affected area to interview oil workers, lawyers, oyster farmers, journalists, marine biologists, oil industry economists – in fact, a bewildering array of people involved in the fallout from the incident.

With that quantity and diversity of material, there's the opportunity to dig into the subject in real depth – and the range of perspectives the show offers is undeniably illuminating. But despite the editing of the interviews providing some interesting insights, they are presented so flatly that you're left wondering why this isn't simply a magazine article. Some jarring humour comes from the actors' sometimes overly faithful delivery of the interviewees' lines – complete with every umm and err. All in all, it's a horribly fascinating subject, but the flatness of the production style makes the show underwhelming. (David Kettle)

■ *Underbelly Cowgate*, 0844 545 8252, until 26 Aug, 3.30pm, £10–£11 (£9–£10).

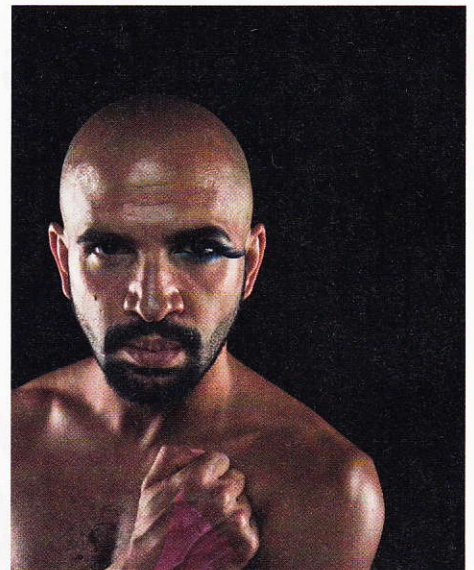
**NGGRFG**

Confessional coming-of-age tale ●●●●●

Aged 16, Buddy aspires to grow up to become Canada's Prime Minister. His teacher pooh-poohs the idea: 'Because your bl . . .' He checks himself. 'I've never known a politician as – um – flamboyant as you.' Buddy's too camp to be black and too black to be camp. Time and again, he slams up against these twin prejudicial pistons. As a young actor, he can't fit the casting clichés.

With subject matter like this, there's an inevitable potency; not least because it feels intimate and raw. Nonetheless, the framework and register are so stereotypically confessional, *Nggrfg* feels almost like a teenage diary adapted into an audition piece demonstrating versatility. Lively though writer-performer Berend McKenzie is, he can't quite find the things in Buddy's story that make it a one-off. In fairness, the stories are better than the grindingly literal staging, so if you can look beyond the format, it's not worth striking off entirely. (Matt Trueman)

■ *theSpace on the Mile*, 0845 508 8316, until 18 Aug, 7.20pm, £7 (£5).

**BOY IN A DRESS**

Thought-provoking and fabulous drag-related cabaret ●●●●●

Androgynous, third-gendered, ginger beauty La JohnJoseph makes a show-and-tell of the idea that all identity is a performance, and none more obviously than that which occurs on the stage, with his conflagration of gender theory, drag performance and recontextualised musical numbers. Claiming a political agenda of advocating acceptance of non-typical genders and sexualities, there is an element of preaching to the converted: those who buy tickets for *Boy in a Dress* are more than likely to already be on board with the concept.

In the spirit of changing façades, the Stand's usual one guy/gal and a microphone set-up has been replaced and the venue is transformed into a seedily glamorous Greenwich Village-style cabaret bar. A closet sits centre stage, spewing forth incarnations of LJJ from different times in her life as he dons and discards outfits and personae as if flipping through a photograph album of her difficult childhood in Liverpool. His verbose script is genre-literate, whipping up song, autobiography, physicality and liberal quotation from the queer theory handbook into a glittering, whirlwind portrait of a tragic heroine. As well as a multitude of costumes, fellow performer Erin Hutching is on hand to enact various aspects of LJJ's story, along with timely and hilarious interjections by stage manager Stephen Quinn, and all the constituent parts work together to dramatise the multifaceted nature of identity. From heartrending recollections of a homophobic Catholic school system to LJJ's burgeoning self-expression in New York, the result is a non-stop sensory explosion of individual personality akin to the alternative drag performances of Jonny Woo. Though there are a few moments that feel like an essay on objectification, the material is at its most affecting when it shows rather than tells, something LJJ is more than capable of, in a dress, a tracksuit or, at times, in nothing at all . . . (Suzanne Black)

■ *The Stand III & IV*, 558 7272, until 26 Aug, 4.20pm, £10.

