

RED, LIKE OUR ROOM USED TO FEEL

Inspirational one-on-one poetry experience ●●●●●

Poetry readings have often suffered from small audiences. Ryan Van Winkle has worked that to his advantage: the size of the audience for *Red, Like Our Room Used To Feel* is precisely one. And that's why it works.

There is nothing scary or awkward about this show. It's charming, it's inspirational and, in fact, I suspect it might be a landmark production for poetry in performance.

Ryan greets you at Summerhall and takes you to a little room painted red and hung with lights, dripping in trinkets that represent carefully collected moments. Settling down together with a cup of tea or glass of port, you choose one of four envelopes. They contain poems, which Ryan reads as you soak up the surroundings for just 20 minutes.

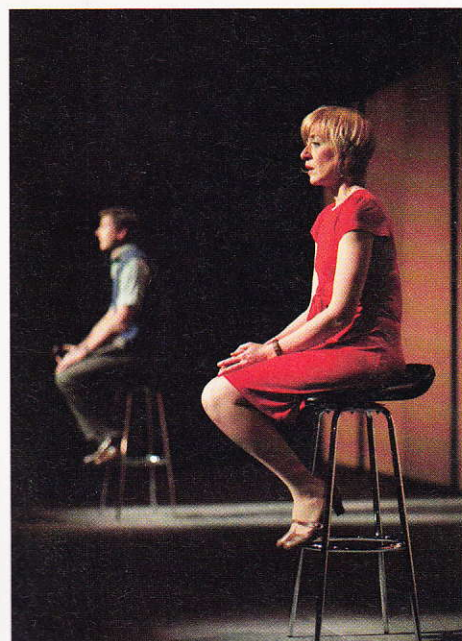
The poetry seems to touch every cluttered corner, infusing the objects with meaning but still leaving enough room for your own unique memories and associations to resonate. Music plays from a stereo exactly like one I had when I was fourteen. There's an old Nikon FM2, bottles of port, piles of candles and a dark-coloured dress slung from a coathanger, while on the walls there's a pin-board smothered in photographs, shopping lists and foreign currency, and a framed quotation from Raymond Carver.

Ryan has clearly thought hard about poetry and performance. The genius of this piece is that it makes you feel not as if you're listening to someone read some poems, but as if poetry is happening to you, right now. In this space, poetry really feels, as it should, personal and universal at the same time – the language of being alive.

As Ryan read to me about rain and childhood, I was cocooned in an intimate human bubble. If you are at all interested in literature, memory, performance or joy, you must see this show.

(Charlotte Runcie)

■ Summerhall, 0845 874 3001, until 24 Aug, times vary throughout the day, £5.



OH, THE HUMANITY AND OTHER GOOD INTENTIONS

Marvellous quintet of short plays ●●●●●

Isn't self-consciousness a ball-ache? It ups the ante, rather, as if all eyes are on you and you're barely making sense, let alone delivering the goods, and you still haven't found what you're looking for, you're not meeting your potential or matching the past and, to top it all off, your trousers have fallen down. Thankfully American playwright Will Eno is at hand with these five precision-honed shorts, each an eloquent metaphor for existential angst, capable of raising both spirits and smiles. There's a sports coach facing the press after a dismal season, personally and professionally; an airline spokesperson offering bereaved relatives awkward sympathy after an accident; and two lonely hearts recording dating videos and testing the waters of the big, wide world.

Eno's texts are delicious and Erica Whyman's production does them real credit. Classily staged on a suspended platform, it boasts superb performances from Tony Bell, John Kirk and, in particular, Lucy Ellinson. Frank, funny and consoling, this is pretty much what theatre's for. (Matt Trueman)

■ Northern Stage at St Stephen's, 558 3047, until 25 Aug, 6.40pm, £14 (£10).



DRACULA: SEX, SUCKING AND STARDOM

A thoroughly camp vamp ●●●●●

Jonathan Harker leaves his fiancée Mina to go to Transylvania, where he has some business to transact with a mysterious count. When he gets there, he finds a jazz-handsy vamp obsessed with travelling to England and auditioning for Andrew Lloyd Webber. With a title like that, it was never going to be too faithful to the source material, was it?

Last Chance Saloon's take on the Dracula myth has a lot counting against it: constant references to Lloyd Webber and John Barrowman and excruciatingly cheesy covers of contemporary pop songs ('Suck You' by Cee-Lo, anyone?) threaten to lower it to the level of an ITV variety show. And yet, despite these San Andreas-sized faults, the performers' natural charm saves the day. Simon Naylor's Van Helsing in particular is a delight, channelling Mike Myers' Goldmember without ever straying too far into plagiarism, while certain set-pieces (such as the boat trip across the Channel) display an ingenious wit. A pleasure, albeit a guilty one. (Niki Boyle)

■ Paradise in The Vault, 510 0022, until 27 Aug, 8.40pm, £8-£9 (£7-£7.50).



UNINVITED

Ambitious concept fails to spring to life ●●●●●

Our unnamed protagonist, obsessed by order and routine, returns home from work to discover a stranger in his house. So he makes him a cup of tea. But that's the least of his worries: the talking wallpaper seems to have opinions on everything, and his only hope for salvation lies in a bird-feeding woman and her madeira cake.

Fat Git Theatre's enigmatic show, an adaptation of the novella of the same name by Tyneside writer Peter Mortimer, seems to belong in the same English absurdist tradition as NF Simpson, but it has a far darker edge than that writer's surreal whimsy. It's an ambitious production, with live sound effects, an elaborate set and costumes, and a cast of seven, but ultimately it feels a little thin and spun-out at its hour length. There's probably a message about spontaneity threatening comfortable routine in there somewhere, but it's rather hidden among the lengthy pauses and rather approximate acting. It's an intriguing tale, but it needs a tighter and more compelling production than this one to bring it properly to life. (David Kettle)

■ Bedlam Theatre, 225 9893, until 25 Aug, 2pm, £8 (£7).