

17th January 2019

Well done on a fantastic show, Claudine and Mel. I was lucky enough to catch Tannie and Tannie in November 2018, on what I believe was the first public performance.

The play is beautifully written and superbly acted. I was amazed how tight the performance was for a first show. The play tells a story which is, by turns, jovial and poignant. The two main protagonists are funny and sad in equal measure, and there's real sophistication in the storytelling. The evening was playful but never flippant, the time-jumps, fourth wall breaks, shadow puppets, little songs and moments of ellipsis, make Tannie and Tannie a very special production. The players change characters swiftly, but never lose the audience, a testament to such accomplished writing and acting. The performance is intimate and welcoming, partly due to there being only two cast members, but also due to the nature of the play itself. There's laugh out loud moments, genuine surprises, some darker themes which are treated with sensitivity, and a real sense of intrigue as the story develops. A glance round fellow audience members showed us responding in unison to the deliberate tensions, which are all effectively resolved in a very moving way, but with space for the viewer to transpose some of their own meaning onto what they're experiencing. This, I feel, is an ideal outcome for an audience member.

As a promoter and festival organiser (www.festival.23.org.uk), I'm always looking for unusual performances, with the qualities I describe above. As an audience member I like strange, thought provoking pieces. Performance which aren't so abstract you can't follow them, but which still have an ethereal quality about them. Tannie and Tannie achieves this perfectly, it never compromises itself by being over-complicated, and remains a highly entertaining experience. Because of this I feel the play is able to engage a wide audience, with varied maturity and taste. Tannie and Tannie is one of those rare shows which effectively services the audience on multiple levels, there's stories within stories, but the simplicity with which it is presented gives its players chance to explore real emotional depth.

Both printed and online promotion put me in mind of classics such as Waiting for Godot or Of Mice and Men. I was excited to see the show after seeing the deliberately intriguing promotional material, and I was far from disappointed. It is, of course, high praise to draw comparisons to Beckett and Steinbeck, but Tannie and Tannie really does channel some of the same magic which make those pieces such classics. It also has two women acting as the story tellers. And about time too.

The characters portrayed are flawed, but likeable, a mix of ages and gender, all brought to life in a believable and very real way. As the play closes you realise, for all the straight storytelling, there's been an abstract element all along. This is pitched well, and the show left me pondering its fuller meaning for several days. The play delivers its messages subtly, never preaching, but with clear intent. Themes of friendship and human shortcomings give a timeless element, but it also deals with revelation and the feeling that something not fully defined is coming to an end, these areas make it very much in tune with the world at large.

I think there's a fit for Tannie and Tannie in many settings; a small cast, low impact production, high impact story, make it ripe for performance in a range of environments. It would be ideal for its own touring run, or perhaps part of a rural touring scheme, potentially schools, and certainly fringe and festival events. I'll certainly be looking to programme Tannie and Tannie in the future and I look forward to watching the faces of the audience as they witness such accomplished storytelling. I may even, with the support of Claudine and Mel, plan workshop sessions following the performance, to deconstruct the themes as there's plenty to work with.

I hope it's clear from the words above that I am very enthusiastic about this performance. It's sometimes the case where one is asked to write recommendations or give feedback on someone's creative endeavours where one struggles to find complimentary things to say. Happily, in this case I have nothing but positive comments. I wish everyone involved every success in sharing this piece of work.

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