

'Fencing for Losers'

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ROB Johnston's intriguing two-hander explores the unrealised sexual relationship between a young Salford drug-addict and an older, fallen-from-grace public relations professional, whose paths and egos cross and clash at an FE college evening class.

Directed with imagination, humour and a masterly feel for pace by Richard Sinnott, this Ignition Stage production is a perfect showcase for Hungarian-born actress Szilvi Naray-Davey as Susan.

Her apparent disregard for Danny, played with an intense thoughtfulness by emerging talent Phil Briggs, commands our attention throughout.

Her haughty and clenched superiority complex is the perfect foil for Danny's rough and unravelled potential.

And indeed the entire play – from its machine-gun verbal exchanges to its carefully crafted movement – is a fencing metaphor.

Delightful skill

Easy to overstate, but here it is handled with a delightful skill by director and cast alike.

Susan wonders if anyone is going to attend her curiously free fencing lessons, when in walks serial learner Danny, of no fixed abode, Salford, immediately doubting her ability because she is a woman.

Or does he? Susan, made myopic by her prejudices, puts Danny neatly in his place with a display of champion fencing, only to be placed equally neatly in her own by his verbal equivalent.

She is hiding something, but he is not hiding enough and it is their growing co-dependency, as well as Danny's drug-addled inability to prevent dreams and reality from morphing, that forms both the essential dark heart and the redemptive possibilities of the play.

Sparkling production

Authored by Rob Johnston, 'Fencing For Losers' essays that most difficult of subtexts, class, with intelligence and originality.

Nicely underscored by Sinnott's witty musical scene changes, this small but sparkling production leaves the Buxton Festival Fringe audience in no doubt it deserves a bigger platform.