

Edinburgh Fringe 2018

Bad Things Happen Here

Healthy Oyster Collective



Genre: [Political](#), [Theatre](#)

Venue: [Venue 29 Paradise in The Vault - The Annexe](#)

Festival: [Edinburgh Fringe](#)

Low Down

“They’re coming for everyone that’s not a them, and I have to fight that”, says a young adult ..revolutionary. This is a land of fear, where everyone is the other and no one escapes. An institutionalized suppression of free thought and action is a landscape of scarcity. Where words trail off and people just disa...

Review

Bad Things Happen Here is composed of punchy, well-crafted scenes, almost a how-to manual for fear-controlled despotism. This two-hander jumps in time and location, eventually coalescing into a kaleidoscope of restless anxiety, a narrative that unfolds over time to reveal the true horrors of a world all too familiar to our own.

This is a philosophical minefield; one nun wonders, “if I don’t object am I sinful?” and the other retorts, “God has to help you, I have to keep the church clean.” The show’s simple, powerful truths are seamlessly woven into the language of the play. Characters leave off the words “I” and “me” as they lose their sense of identity. When asked what they think, there is often silence – they don’t think. Thinking has ramifications. Expressing dissident thoughts is not a crime because a crime can be reported. Actually, a crime has to be reported. And criminals are never tried for their crimes because criminals don’t exist, “report missing persons to the police and report disappeared persons to no one.”

Trusted objects become dangerous symbols. The light post is traditionally a symbol of safety, a light in the dark keeping dangers at bay. But in this world, if a light post is lit, a person can be seen. “Being seen” is not the positive sort of notice most people crave. Being seen means the dogs are watching. Dogs are not cute and cuddly; they are cops. Cops do not uphold the law, they define it. Law dictates that crimes must be reported to cops. People must say they will report crimes, even if they are committed by dogs. People do not report crimes. Crimes trigger light posts which bring dogs, which get you disappeared. It’s mysterious, it’s desperate, it’s an absolutely captivating set of puzzle pieces.

The set supports this sense of blank cruelty. It is simple and well thought out, a backdrop with a single jagged line of black: black ink across a page, a schism of darkness amidst the dangerous ever watching light, an escape. The black line cuts the actors behind the head as they traverse the stage, it pierces the neck, the abdomen, the legs. This ever-present minimalist violence is paired with two light fixtures which are revealed as light posts. They are being watched...and perhaps so are we.

Despite strong writing, the staging doesn't fully take into account the playing space. At times the transitions are awkward – they fail to define specific spaces and create a flat depthless effect. While that may be a good metaphor, visually, it is at best confusing. For most of the show, the actors are staged very close to the front of the stage. For anyone behind the first row, the bodies of the actors disappear, creating a “floating head” effect. Inexplicably, halfway through the show, the actors use more of the stage. The show's physical reality becomes much more compelling.

The actors play a plethora of different characters. Most of the people depicted have few distinctive physical or vocal characteristics which make it hard to distinguish between them. However, the actors have a clear bond – they listen and react to each other, forming genuine, compelling relationships. We care for them because they care for each other.

Embedded with complex philosophy, expressed in simple sentences, this show will linger with you for many weeks to come. It is easy to portray modern dystopia, it is harder to dismantle the complex systems that make one. Despite halting fears there is the possibility of escape, protest and revolution; there is unwavering and unyielding hope. *Bad Things Happen Here* is brilliant for its contradictions. It points to our shared and immediate reality – the dangers of taking action and the even more present danger of doing nothing at all.

Published August 13, 2018 by [Emma Plotkin](#)

Show Website

<https://www.healthyoysters.com/bad-things-happen-here.html>