



STEP Young Critics Programme 2008

Welcome to the STEP Young Critics Programme 2008

The STEP Young Critics Programme 2008 has given young people from two schools in Southwark the chance to work with a professional journalist (Andrew Dickson, The Guardian and Heather Neill, The Stage) to learn how to be a theatre critic. Participants in the Programme were also given the chance to attend a talk given by Michael Billington (The Guardian) and see at least one show at a STEP partner theatre (Oval House Theatre, Unicorn Theatre, Union Theatre and Half Moon Young People's Theatre)

This was a real chance for the young people to develop their writing skills, learn to be critical observers and interact with industry professionals. They were also given the chance to tell the theatres what they think of the shows which are created with them in mind.

This guide features reviews by students at **The Charter School**

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The STEP Young Critics Programme 2008 was funded by the Financial Times, a long-standing STEP corporate partner. STEP would especially like to thank Tom Glover and Hamish Pearson for their support of STEP and the Young Critics Programme 2008.

Special thanks also to the theatres involved in the Programme and Heather, Andrew and Michael for their commitment to the young people who may be the next generation of theatre critics.



Catalysta

Oval House Theatre

21 Oct - 8 Nov 2008

Lauren McCrostie and Tallulah Harper

The play opens with a dilapidated wooden house on the Caribbean island of Grenada. We soon realise that hurricane IVAN has just hit that part of the island, but that is not the only problem that's erupting.

Every family is suffering since the hurricane, especially this one. The story shows us about very different people trying to live together. There has recently been a terrible hurricane in Grenada. Repairing their house with no money is the least of this family's worries.

The scenery of the play was in great detail. The set was useful and fitted in perfectly with the storyline. The peeling blue paint and bumpy wooden floor really gave the effect that the hurricane hit the house.

The lighting of the play was also very impressive. It was amazing how they got the timing right every time. They did this when an actor turned on a false light and a spotlight right above it turned on so it seemed like the light was on when it wasn't.

The sounds weren't realistic enough to create a natural atmosphere. The timing of the sounds was satisfactory, they could be improved. We were keen on the sound of water flowing which they used at the end of each scene.

We felt the different range of actors and ac-

tresses weren't at the same ability which made the performance difficult to follow. The older performers were by far the best out of everyone. Cedric Henderson Duncan played Edward who was an elderly grandfather who was on medication and making his wife's life a misery. He was always in role of his character and played it exceptionally well. Carmen Munroe played Eartha who was a feisty grandmother who was lending money. She had a fantastic accent and was always in role throughout the play. The mother and the father were played by Lisa Davina Phillip (Pat), Cornell S John (Lionel). Pat was a mother of a child who was constantly asked by her husband for money, her mother, on the other hand (Eartha), was demanding rent. Lionel kept being accused of not helping support the family in its time of need; we found he was too theatrical and far too shouty. La-Charne Jolly played 11 year old Connie who was a messy, challenging and disruptive school girl. We found that she was time-consuming and was too over the top with her acting skills, but she was always in character. Angela Wynter played Catalysta who was a visitor in the household: she snapped out of character easily.

Our overall opinion of the play was that it wasn't clear enough to absorb and it was hard to follow. The acting wasn't as professional as we would've hoped but the scenery, props and lighting were outstanding.

Red Fortress

Unicorn Theatre

18 Oct - 8 Nov 2008

Elin Clapton

Red Fortress sparks the flight of imagination, but the ending leaves a lot to be desired. A story about the choices three children have to make, about friendship and about the differences in life. Religion and the prejudices we all have are a constant theme in *Red Fortress*: myths and how we interpret them. Wise sayings are projected on the floor and provide a moral almost for each scene.

The acting is realistic and engaging, the characters are well performed but in bits some of the actors seemed to come out of role when the action was elsewhere. In places the acting was a bit wooden but otherwise it was excellent and convincing. Some of the characters were very engaging and made jokes and funny remarks. This lightened what would have been a more serious play. Some of the acting was a bit over the top and slightly forced but nonetheless convincing.

As the first strains of the music reach us, we travel back in time. The musician's traditional outfits give us a real flavour of the music. With a fantastic array of instruments, music and a wonderful setting, you are really in Granada not in the Unicorn Theatre. The musicians sit in a covered tent that only serves to add to the flavour of their music. Alone, the music enchants you and draws you in but everything adds. Cheaper than a

holiday to Granada but almost as effective and definitely as realistic.

Amazing oriental rugs hang from the ceiling and in the centre of the semicircular stage is an orange tree. The lighting adds the heat and the glare of the midday sun. There is not that much variety in the lighting but it is effective if a little monotonous. The scene changes take a while but the musicians fill the gaps with interesting and impressive music, otherwise there is nothing to interest you whilst the scene changes are happening but there is a significant gap. The props are simple and not over the top; ones that aren't needed aren't used. In one point there is a type of aerial display that is performed on a long, white rope, this adds to the display rather than takes away. In short, simple but effective.

517 years ago Rabia and Luis meet Iago in Granada, southern Spain, now their lives are linked together in a way none of them could imagine on that hot dusty day. Rabia and Luis have grown up together then the Christian peasant Iago arrives. With their families struggling for money the three make decisions that change their lives. Luis: a scientist and a Jew, Rabia: a dreamer and a Muslim and Iago: judgemental and Christian. Three children drawn together when their city is under attack, can they work together to save their families in a desperate race against time? A moving plot that brings together aspects of their lives that are still present in our lives today: religion, change, betrayal, friendship and love. But with an incomplete ending you go away longing to understand what happens to them. It's a wonderfully staged production that despite certain shortcomings makes an exciting theatre trip, even if it is a bit long.

Interesting and engaging the story is easy to understand and humorous: so fun to watch and exciting. Not a perfectly staged play but an excellent experience and I definitely enjoyed myself. A play that lives up to the plot and the excitement it promises in the brochure. Something definitely worth seeing and overall it was amazing, everything came together to create an exciting piece of theatre. It was a story kind of about how we are now but set in the past, about how we were and about how we are now.

Lauren Davis

It was a wet and windy Thursday in November and five excited and intrigued friends waited in the front row while the cast of *Red Fortress* prepared to begin their story....

Red Fortress is about three friends, Rabia, Iago and Luis who, despite belonging to different religions and cultures, are united in their eagerness to discover a better world. While a holy war threatens to rip apart their home city, they fight to protect their families. This play is set in 1491 when happiness and freedom was hard to come by and it raises interesting and unexpected points about war and religion.

Minimal props are used to maximum effect, such as carpets on the walls and floors to illustrate the warm and safeness of home, and lanterns used to create a pathway within the mystical palace. Lighting creates atmosphere and - before the play has even started - tells you where the story is set. The music, played by three African instrumentalists, is skilfully played and adds colour and dimen-

sion to the production. The whole theatre is used to make you feel part of the storyline and actors appear from all angles which transports you to another world.

The script is funny, moving and action packed and tackles subjects such as war, death of loved ones and homosexuality. The actors are always in character and perform brilliantly, their stage presence is fantastic. The stand out character was Rabia, whose performance captured the heart of the audience, while appealing to the younger audience members with her wit. The plot may have been too complex for children under ten to grasp; however, it did mention this on the posters and leaflets.

This is a gem of a play. I enjoyed every aspect of it and would recommend it to anyone with a love of stories and adventure. I had high hopes when I came to see this and I was not disappointed.

Ellen Francis

As I settled down into my comfortable, if a little cramped, bench and stared at the stage I had no idea what to expect, the best two hours of my life or the worst. On stage was a canopy made of an oriental rug and beneath it sat three musicians. They each held curious instruments, softly plucking at their strings and drumming on their hides, they looked perfectly content. I looked around at the audience and saw many young faces gazing around in wonder, either exclaiming at the wonderful array of oriental rugs hanging as a backdrop to the stage or conferring in whispers with their friends. The first scene

was entrancing and in moments I felt transported back 517 years to the City of the Red Fortress and it was as though I could almost smell the fresh sweet oranges and hear the hustle and bustle of the busy city streets around.

The story begins with two children, Luis and Rabia, who have grown up living next door to each other in Granada. Luis is a boy of science and unlike Rabia thinks little of romance and fairytales. He was philosophical, a strict Jew and stuck by his religion. In contrast, Rabia lives in her own little world. She thinks only of love, magic and fairytales. So when the chance to buy magic books comes along she grabs it, much to her mother's distress. Even though they are Muslims, Rabia and her mother live very cordially next door to their Jewish neighbours. And then comes Iago, along with his family.

For me, Iago was the most believable character in the entire play. He was Christian, stubborn, opinionated, bullied, judgmental and scarred by his past. Soon all peace was shattered. Rabia's desperation to sell the books to please her mother became insane and Luis and Iago left in pursuit of the man who had bought Luis's invention. The rest of the story portrayed their desperate fight to return home and warn their parents of the danger that the religious battle imposed on their city. Their innocence changes dramatically through the play, they start as children and are soon forced to become adults. It begins a fairytale and ends a desperate struggle for forgiveness.

The acting began fabulously with the two young characters Luis and Rabia, played by

Jack Blumenau and Gehane Strehler. The standards they set did nothing but improve throughout the play. The play was not only romantic and dramatic but also humorous. The actor that stood out for me was Amit Sharma he played all of his roles magnificently especially Christopher Columbus. In the scene as Columbus he was very funny and had all of the audience laughing. The acting was consistent and believable and I felt that they were not merely stepping into the character's shoes for the night, but would find it hard to unlace them again when it finished.

The set was designed in an interesting way, instead of trying to create the mood with lots of props they used a small number to great effect. This worked well as props were almost unnecessary with such a descriptive script and after two hours I was still enjoying it, although a little less than when I had first arrived. Lighting was also quite minimal. The costumes were simple and practical, however I found that this was all soon forgotten in the magic of the atmosphere.

It was an evening of wholehearted enjoyment and I felt that the entire audience would have agreed with me. The clapping was ceaseless and as I left the theatre, tired but satisfied, I felt that finally I had found a play worth writing a review about!

Rae Howard and Nancy Boothroyd

A lone spotlight reveals three musicians sitting in a tent of pattern rugs, each one holding a more intriguing instrument than the next. One of them stood up and walked

round the audience setting an authentic atmosphere with his foreign music.

The play is set in the south of Spain. A poorer part of Spain as shown by the old tapestries and simple props, such as orange trees. The tale tells a story of three young children embarking on a journey in a holy war between three religions: Christianity, Judaism and Islam, with each child from one of the above. The script was well written and tackled many serious issues such as war, death and homosexuality, as well as including humour and love.

The actors clearly portrayed their characters as children in playful ways by running, singing, dancing and using brilliant acting skills. Although the acting was superb the fact that the actors kept having their backs toward the audience was a bit off putting. But still, the stage is very round therefore making it harder for the actors to always be facing towards you. What helped was the fact that the actors entered at all angles therefore creating a better wholesome atmosphere. Also at times the plot got harder to follow, but mainly only for the younger children.

Nevertheless all in all the play accommodated all of your needs for joy and laughter as well as love and sorrow.

Muhammad Ali and Me Oval House Theatre 11 - 29 Nov 2008

Muhammad Ali and Me is a fast-moving, energetic play which is performed on a uniquely laid-out stage. It is about a young Nigerian girl whose father goes away and is left with no one but her idol Muhammad Ali. It was acted out by only three people: a man, a young lady and a translator who played the referee. The man acted out three characters, the dad the care worker and the boxer. The young lady acted out the 7-year-old girl and Muhammad Ali. I thought the organisation of the play was very good, but because there were only 3 characters it was quite difficult to follow. It should be set for adults because I didn't follow the story very well and I am 12 years old.

The lighting was quite good, with the lights reflected off the mirrors on the side of the stage. Because the stage was in the middle of the room the lights shone onto the middle of the stage and created a boxing-ring effect. It also went dark at scary moments and created a mysterious feel. There were old-style TVs standing around the edge of the stage, showing occasional clips of Muhammad Ali fighting other people.

I thought that the audience involvement was really quite good. The cast involved you by looking at you and saying extra things to make you or everyone laugh. They also did a card trick in which they used a couple of people in the row to hold up cards.

There wasn't much music in the play but I suppose the play wasn't that much to do with music. There were lots of sound effects, though, and that made the play a lot livelier and more interesting so you didn't get bored.

I think the play went on a bit to long for my liking, but overall I think I would rate it 4 out of 5. It was good performance, and a pleasure to watch.

May Douglas

The story is about a young Nigerian girl of seven whose father leaves her at a young age in a care home to face the cruel world, where the colour of your skin matters. She overcomes obstacles just like her hero Mohamed Ali did.

The characters were played by good, realistic actors and altogether were very convincing. However, I cannot say the same for the plot. A plot like this one would either need more actors or a clearer script, but seeing as neither of these things have been applied to the play it was a complicated and confusing play to understand.

Muhammad Ali and me was a mediocre play; I almost felt disappointed that a great mans life could be portrayed so badly. I found the plot confusing and, as only three actors were involved, it was hard to understand who the characters were. I spent three quarters of the first half of the play thinking the main actor was Muhammad Ali.

Even though I found the plot hard to understand, the play was low-budget and it did make the most of the set and scenery it had. The use of lighting and props did set the scene for me, however I believe a play is about the plot and actors not about the fancy lighting.

Laurence King

Muhammad Ali and Me is a play set in Britain, Nigeria and America. It is about a girl who lives in Nigeria and is forced to live in a foster home in London because her dad has to go to war. She moves in with an old woman, her son and some other foster children. She has a hard time in Britain and Muhammad Ali was her idol because he was a black man living in America in a time of racism and she imagined that he was talking to her and giving her advice. There are only three actors in the whole play so it is very confusing who some characters are and it would make the scene clearer if there were more actors in it. The props and the stage were very good and every now and then a projection of Muhammad Ali in a fight is shown on the stage and the stage is cleverly put together to form a living room and a boxing ring at the same time. At one moment in the play there is a bang and a small cloud of smoke erupts offstage. The costumes are very well done and although there are only three actors and it is very confusing you can just about tell which is which. The storyline wasn't that interesting and there weren't many climaxes but it did show the struggle of a young black girl growing up in 1970s London.

Overall it was an ok play but could have been improved a lot by having more actors.

Sam Wikeley

Muhammad Ali and Me is a fast moving, energetic, three-man play which is performed at the Oval House Theatre on a uniquely laid-out stage. It is about a young Nigerian girl called Susan whose father leaves her and is left with no one but her idol Muhammad Ali. The story is told through poetry, dance, speech, African a capella singing, interaction with the audience and British sign language.

The style and the acting of the play are very different to what you expect when you usually go to the theatre. Firstly, the stage is sandwiched between the audience on two sides. This can be quite confusing: the play often has a few different things going on at the same time – for example a boxing ring in one corner and then a living room in the other. All through the play one woman would translate everything into sign language, but the same woman would also act, and at times you didn't really know where to look.

The lighting was very simple and would usually stay the same, apart from occasionally when the lights would dim so you could see a video that was projected down from the ceiling on to the stage.

The story line also covers many real life issues such as races, ages and religions and even shows Muhammad Ali through rarely seen fight footage videos projected on to the stage and showed on televisions around the stage. The energy and versatility of the cast is amazing as Mojisola Adebayo (The

Fighter) takes on both the role of Muhammad Ali and the young girl, Susan. Charlie Folorunsho (The Corner Man) transforms into the school bully, the strict father and many, many more. Jacqui Beckford (The Referee) connects the two stories as she moves around the stage with endless energy, signing what the characters are saying.

Although the plot is exciting and energetic, a lot of it is unclear and hard to understand at times. For example the relationship between Muhammad and Susan is often blurred.

In conclusion Muhammad Ali and Me is a fast, exciting and energetic play that is definitely one for people of any ages to see.

Sixteen Up
Unicorn Theatre
12 - 22 Nov 2008

Phoebe Butler

A story about young love and compassion. This play takes on the scenario of two stereotypical teenagers. Two actors playing the role of teenagers' first love. The play was a typical love story; however as it was a Box Clever production it gave it a memorable, unique charm.

The cast was Adam (Lloyd Thomas) and Evie (Elizabeth Cadwallader). As it was only a two character performance other characters that occurred were played by puppet people but also the interchanging voices of Thomas and Cadwallader. The acting took place in different ways: sometimes they would talk to you, sometimes they would talk to each other and they even spoke for other characters. This reflected their versatile acting. Much of the time when they spoke they used similes, metaphors and rhymes. This was not to create an effect but was related to the story. Their acting included sexual humour and bad language, therefore I do not think it would be appropriate for anyone under the age of 12.

The props and scenery for this play were very limited. However, this play has a scene of individuality made by only the two coat stands on each side of the stage. The

only other things on the stage were the two boxes which would count for scenery. These clever boxes were a framework of wood with a plain white canvas which projected images and animation. Along with animation they also used their silhouettes which worked well. The animation that they used was good and at points created humour. However, sometimes it was unnecessary and not connected to the story. There were no blackouts where stagehands came to move the boxes, instead the characters would move them. I thought this technique was messy and didn't look good.

Sixteen Up was not a performance with over-the-top acting and fancy costumes but a "down to earth" performance that teenagers can relate to. This is also the case with the costumes; they are real life, everyday outfits.

The ending of the play was quite confusing and not very clear but it was like the rest of the play. Overall the play had quite a weak plot and was not a very exiting play as you kept on expecting something to happen but it never did. I do think it was well cast and that the acting was excellent but I think it had a weak plot. I think the play worked but had a bit of a bumpy plot however left you in thought.

Cecilia Hay

Sixteen Up was a simple but effective play about two teenagers experiencing a complex and somewhat confusing first love.

The use of animation, puppets and shadows makes the play a once in a life time experi-

ence. The play begins with a short opening with the two characters, Adam (Lloyd Thomas) and Evie (Elizabeth Cadwallader) dancing behind two shadow screens. This gives an interesting feel to the play.

As there are only two characters they use animation and puppets to describe and use other characters such as the mum of Adam and the boy/girlfriend of the two characters.

The actors were brilliant at their characters as it was clear that the part must have been a difficult part to play as it was a funny but incredibly descriptive play.

Also the theatre was a perfect place to hold such an open and interesting play. The props were simple but effective and the costumes and make-up were a clever choice as they were simple but realistic.

To go with the simple theme of the play the music is also simple but once again effective as it is only one man who plays the guitar throughout the play. The play is highly recommended to watch and is a great group activity for all your friends.

Hannah Jeffrey

Step into the world of Adam and Evie. This play is a sort of love story about a totally confusing and beautiful first love. It opens with a nearly empty stage, apart from two large white screens where the actors soon emerge from. I was slightly dubious about this play and I didn't expect it to be any good but when the lights went down and the story began to

unfold, I found it an enjoyable and funny drama about two teenagers coping with falling in love.

Sixteen Up is a story of first love and total inexperience. The play opens with Adam, a modern 16 year old boy. He steps out from behind his screen and onto the empty stage. He tells the audience of his early relationship with Evie (and how it grew to be something more) with an embarrassed awkwardness that seems typical of a teenage boy. He then returns behind his screen and Evie steps out to tell her story, her puzzlement at Adam and his actions. The second half starts a year later, at 17, when they both have new partners and new lives. They both try to forget each other but instead fall deeper in love. The story is powerful, moving and realistic. The plot is believable and sensible. Although it is slightly unimaginative it makes up for it in its originality. It's very intense and honest, you are drawn in, whether you like it or not!

The set was sparse, yet well chosen. Two white screens housed the actors. Animations, images and words were projected onto these screens which was very effective and enjoyable for the audience. Lights were also shone on the back of the screen so we could only see the actors' silhouettes. The choreography was electric, using bright lights shone onto the screens so we could only see the actors' shadows dancing. This was very powerful in contrast to the bright lights. The choreography was sometimes amusing and it was well done. The actors' singing was awful. They only sung a few lines yet it was out of tune and badly strained.

The acting was realistic but lacking slightly in

conviction. Both characters were well formed and well portrayed. The acting was natural and smooth with both actors fitting into their roles almost seamlessly. I enjoyed both characters' performances; especially the way they used their voices to become other characters. Both characters were interesting but I especially liked the character of Evie, who was funny and feisty. Throughout they play both characters challenge each other with a fantastic intensity. Though there were only two actors, there was no need for other characters and it was interesting to watch. The relationships and tension between the characters was well done.

The script was amazing. Repetition was a constant feature throughout the play, where the characters would repeat each others words and phrases. The dialogue was very amusing, jokes were slipped in which the audience immensely enjoyed. There was also a lot of rhyming, which was cleverly done and nice to listen to. The script was smooth and flowing, there were no catches and it seemed to move easily from one line to the next. It was very clever as there were a lot of similes and metaphors in the text, which often made it hard to gauge exactly what the characters were saying. But I really liked this as it added to the confused atmosphere of the play.

I really enjoyed this play; it was funny and serious at the same time, moving and emotional. It was very realistic and was nice to step into someone else's confused and disorderly mind for an hour and forty minutes. Both actors made the story real for me, and they made you empathize with the characters. Often we don't know how confusing it is

to be a teenager and in love for the first time, this play brings you down to earth and opens you up to the intense feelings of two 16 year olds. A sensational sort of love story!

Phoebe Theodorou

The Unicorn Theatre presents *Sixteen Up*, an untold love story of two 16 year olds Ad and Evie who find confusion and complication at first love. This is a brilliant play from Box Clever who focus their performances for young people and writing about life here and now. Directed by Iqbal Khan who also directed Box Clever's production *Dirty Kissing* last year that got fantastic reviews. Khan trained at the National Studio, Leicester Haymarket Theatre, Middlesex University and the Academy Drama School.

This well scripted play is energetic, humorous and a well told story that uses poetry to express their young love for each other. There was a good range of colourful language that was well presented throughout the play. The story of *Sixteen Up* only uses simple but effective scenery like wooden box set and projected animation that makes the play fun and enjoyable. With live music and lighting, it creates a magical and delightful atmosphere.

An easy but effective storyline with lighting that plays a big role in a 'Sort of love story'. Well acted and written. The acting was convincing to the audience that the two 16 year olds were deeply in love. The scene at the very end of the production I thought, was brilliantly done. This was the scene where Evie was daydreaming about Ad and her

sitting on the box set exchanging gifts to show their love for each other.

A sort of love story that spreads laughter and enjoyment to the audience and no doubt whoever goes to see it.

Highly recommended for young teenagers.

Jazz Harris and Kesta McLeish

Sixteen Up is a love-filled tale of two sixteen year olds, Adam and Evie, tackling the difficulties of an emotional and physical relationship.

The lights dimmed and the audience hushed to a silence as a spot lit guitar player strummed a western-indie tune. As the song came to an end, two wooden, box-shaped screens became the centre of attention to reveal mysterious silhouettes. These performed a synchronized dance as the story began. These screens were later used for projecting animation and also for staging rooms. This simple set construction ensured that the audience was focused on the actors throughout with no distractions from too many props or background fussiness.

Adam, played by Lloyd Thomas as 'average boy', came out casually wearing his pyjamas, later on switching to more cool wear of a waistcoat and tie. Our first view of Evie (Elizabeth Cadwallader) is wearing a simple nightshirt and socks – very teenage – giving us a strong sense of her youthfulness. The definition of night and day by clothing by the director helped balance the simplicity of the

set and allowed us to place the timeframe of the play.

The plot wasn't too clear to us at the beginning as there was no storyline as such just a dialogue from the actors, but later on, as it expanded to a simple love story it became clear that the characters wanted to draw us into their world. The actors simply explained recent events and their emotions. The humour created some laugh-out-loud moments for most of the audience. The physical actions that went with the description of the sex they had together had most teenagers in the audience laughing and cringing at the same time. Later an animation of 'singing in the rain' but with yellow rain gave a graphic but hilarious view of what had gone on. The audience's reactions to the jokes went from hysterical laughter to a simple 'eww!'

The simple use of spotlights to highlight who was talking and key moments in the play was well planned and worked well in combination with the visual effects of the animations – particularly in the club scene.

Both the actors had to perform more than one role at certain points. Evie's two best friends (both played by her) had a chavvy (South London slang) accent and a Liverpudlian accent both of which she carried off well. Meanwhile Adam as his Dad differentiated with physical movements and was equally successful.

Evie was an average teenager who explored the regrettable world of sex. On the other hand, Adam was the more emotional of the two but at the same time rather horny and more willing to explore the 'dirtier' side of

sex. Considering what the subject was they both dealt with it very maturely. The director succeeded in giving the impression that they were sexually active without having intercourse on stage.

We really enjoyed this play and would highly recommend it, though maybe for older kids than us (we're 12). It certainly made us think and the playwright has succeeded in making us realise that sex is not something to go into lightly.

Eleanor Sanders-White

A minimalist setting with nothing but two large screens and a man playing guitar in the corner comes into view. Immediately sexuality is put into play as the clear silhouettes of a teenage boy and girl form behind the screens and dim lights come up on the black stage of the aptly named play *Sixteen Up*.

The teenage boy, who we find out is 16, walks out from behind the left hand screen. He is quite obviously talking to himself and instead of being very sure of himself when it comes to sex, which many boys try to give the impression that they are, he talks about it in a very frank, honest way. The great thing about him is that he gives such a convincing performance. He is awkward, confused, frustrated and struggling to find himself and this is what separates the play from just being a sort of sex education production. By this I mean the way that the play, though it is mainly about sex, doesn't focus on the actual graphic sex, but more on how it's all about new experiences at that age, and finding your own self and identity at a time when

your body, mind and just about everything is changing.

The clever thing about *Sixteen Up*, and what gives it so much character, is that there are only two actors throughout the entirety of the show. It is all from their individual points of view, with all conversations with relatives and friends shown by one actor putting on different voices. As well as this, boyfriends and girlfriends are clothing inventively made to symbolise that character's personality using items like a hoodie for example, which is held up by some kind of frame so that the actors can manoeuvre it. Both these ways of representation are particularly effective because they are different and almost unique to the play and, give the play its charm.

We follow the stories of both the girl and the boy as they deal with sex in their own separate ways. They both talk about sex, sometimes bluntly, sometimes using metaphors or at times with friends and there are numerous parts that do, most definitely, make you cringe but because a lot of the more embarrassing topics are mostly done through the medium of cartoon projections and a lot of action is done behind screens, it manages to seem quite innocent. The play feels somewhat relaxed and not too serious because of the fact that it is predominantly done one on one to the audience and because it is a very small production. However, it still looks professionally done and even has a household name as the guitar player is actually from the band Aqualung.

The only problem is that it is hard to judge who the play is aimed at because it seems to have a relatively small age range as, as it is

a 14+ it is unlikely to be a production that the whole family goes to see together! Moreover, many people, especially in the audience I was in, did not seem ready for the play. Lots of the older members of the audience kept glancing round the audience with shocked looks on their faces and a noticeable amount of nervous laughter ensued at some of the more uncomfortable moments but despite all this it's a really well done play and if you're not too coy, it's absolutely worth seeing.

Sweeney Todd Union Theatre 13 Nov - 6 Dec 2008

Tallulah Harper

The musical tells the story of Benjamin Barker, also known as Sweeney Todd, who returns to London from Australia after spending fifteen years in prison on a false accusation.

The stage wasn't impressive and could've easily been improved. The stage was set out by having a higher stage than the audience and it was made out of intentionally rigid wood that was used for every scene. They had extra doors placed around the room which the actors came running in and out of which was a good use of space. They also made use of the fire exit and put smoke coming out of it which supposedly was the baking oven for the pies. They also used corridors behind the audience so you could hear but not see them.

The lighting wasn't very good because they only used a spotlight to shine onto characters. When they weren't using the spotlight they would use small lit-up candles which gave a nice atmosphere that fitted in very well with the story.

The sound wasn't striking but still satisfactory. They used the sound of rumbling when something bad happened and it roared under your feet which gave you the shivers and it

was nicely effective. They also used maracas when something bad happened which was subtle and quiet but clever. They didn't have a large orchestra that was noticeable, but the piano was a bit too loud and often overtook the actor's voice sometimes which was annoying.

Some of the actors and actresses weren't as good as others, but a personal favourite of mine was feisty Mrs. Lovett who was played by Emma Francis who had an exceedingly good singing voice and was just how I imagined Mrs. Lovett to be. Sweeney Todd (look above for picture) also played a superior part and was played by Christopher Howell. He had a very masculine voice and angry personality-as a mass murderer should! There was a Beggar Woman who turned out to play a very important role in Barker's life beforehand and she was played by Róisín Sullivan. Someone who didn't impress me was Joanna (Katie Stokes), who wasn't very good at singing. She also wasn't very loud when she spoke and disappointed me in her acting skills.

My overall opinion is that Sweeney Todd was remarkably good but the orchestra was quite poor and the setting could've been enhanced more. I thought that the acting was fantastic and the singing was phenomenal! I really recommend it!

Lauren McCrostie

Benjamin Barker has just got out of 15 years in prison. He wishes and hopes to come back to a loving wife and child. But instead he comes back to a supposedly dead wife and

an adopted child. Barker seeks revenge from the person who took it all from him, Judge Turpin. I personally thought that it was all over the place in some parts of the play and it could have been better.

The scenery of *Sweeney Todd* was very well used. They only had a couple of planks of wood for their background but it fitted in with the performance pretty well. The stage and part of the floor that they were using was planks of wood too. The only thing I could say to improve was to use the stage as something else like a bench or chair, because it looked a bit strange compared to other plays I've seen.

The props that they used were very limited. They only used around five an act which is either very clever or very risky. Throughout the play Sweeney's barbers equipment increased. They could have used props just around the stage to give it the atmosphere of the scene.

The musical numbers were a bit too much for me. They gave the idea that they were trying too hard. At the end of every scene they started and ended with the same repetitive lines, it honestly almost bored me to death. I could think of much better singers, one of the characters was awful: they sounded and looked like they were singing from their throats and straining their voices.

Some of the actors were really good; others didn't stand out from the crowd enough. I don't think that all of the actors grasped the melodramatic play very well. They seemed that they weren't in character most of the time, which let the musical thriller down

slightly. Miss Lovett was very good, she was in character perfectly but I could see that the actor had tried to make the role in her way which I personally admire. But unfortunately throughout the performance she lost her part and the characteristics of her role. Sweeney Todd was a very strong actor and had quite a low and loud vocal range so in some parts where he was singing a duet with Miss Lovett you couldn't hear her at all! He was a good actor but I don't think he suited the demon barber role very well.

My overall opinion of the performance was it was quite hard to absorb in parts, the story-line wasn't clear enough but it was very enjoyable to watch. The only thing which really irritated me the night of the performance was that there was a great big black pillar right in the centre of my viewing perspective. So however hard I tried to move round in my seat I could never see the play in full which upset me quite a bit.

Locked In Half Moon 18 - 20 Nov 2008

Amy Pitura-Riley

Locked In is a show about two boys, Blaze (MC) and Riqi (DJ) who have a radio station. Then a girl Zahida comes along and their friendship starts to get rough. When Blaze gets a call from a gangster to do a mystery job that pays well, things go even more downhill. Zahida always dreamed of being a photographer and really wants a good camera. Blaze decides to buy it for her out of the money he's getting. But Riqi has plans too. *Locked In* was written by Fin Kennedy and performed at the Half Moon Young People's Theatre.

The scenery in *Locked In* is really inventive with all the rubbish under the stage. The props were clever, I liked how they made some of the props in perspex instead of just getting them which could have been dangerous. Also the chair was clever too because it was partly made out of a phone book! I think they acted well with the scenery around them.

The acting in *Locked In* was really good. They all looked like they enjoyed themselves a lot and played the characters convincingly. I think it was a hard show to perform with all the dancing and singing. And they performed it brilliantly. They all suited their parts really well too. Their costumes really suited their

parts and looked good for their character.

I liked the way they planned *Locked In*, I think it worked really well. I liked how they sang and danced almost all of the time. Also it was good when they said things like "then he started asking me loads of questions" and then the other guy did what he just said. I thought it was clever that they only had three actors in it.

In conclusion I think it was really good and enjoyed myself very much and I'm glad I came and saw it. At the end there was a talk and you got to ask the actors about their experience which I enjoyed because we got to find out a bit about the actors which was good. I also like how they did the programme because it was a CD with all the songs they sang on it. I enjoyed it very much. I would give *Locked In* 4/5 stars.

For more details on the theatres and theatre companies involved in the STEP Young Critics Programme 2008 please contact:

Box Clever Theatre

020 7357 0550 / admin@boxclevertheatre.com

www.boxclevertheatre.com

Half Moon Young People's Theatre

Box Office: 020 7709 8900

www.halfmoon.org.uk

Oval House Theatre

Box Office: 020 7582 7680

www.ovalhouse.com

Unicorn Theatre

Box Office: 020 7645 0560

www.unicorntheatre.com

Union Theatre

Box Office: 020 7261 9876

www.upandcoming.webeden.co.uk

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STEP 2008-2009

STEP creates many opportunities for Southwark's young people to access theatre and drama activities across the borough.

The 2008 Festival, *STEP Forward*, which the Young Critics Programme 2008 is part of, has enabled young people in Southwark to access activities in their schools and local theatre venues. This year's Festival showcased the way in which theatre and performing arts activities are key to developing and progressing, moving forward and moving on.

Young People living and attending school in Southwark can get more involved in STEP by joining the STEP Youth Forum - this is a chance to see more theatre performances in Southwark venues and attend workshops delivered by youth theatre practitioners. It is also a chance to help organise STEP activities and have a say on the youth theatre on offer in Southwark.

For more information on STEP initiatives please contact:

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020 7708 6124 – step@theatrepeckham.co.uk