

Too long unsaid

1. “Talking is still terrifying”

Review of Too Long Unsaid: Studio Show

Too Long Unsaid presents a physicalised anthology of prose and poetry that brings to life experiences of growing up queer in the UK in the 21st Century. Using physical theatre and effective staging, the show takes the audience on a journey of tumultuous feelings of anxiety and vulnerability while being honest and genuine in delivery.

The staging succeeded in creating a sense of intimacy with the audience. The placement of the audience in inner and outer disjointed circles in a studio space allowed an immersive experience, where the audience had no choice but to completely submerge themselves in the intense emotions being projected by the actors. The staging allowed for a greater dimensional perspective as each audience member experienced a different perspective, which was especially effective in the opening prose. A coming out video when seen on the screen is never the only perspective; a perspective behind the screen where one only faces the back of the actor, amplifies the effect of the words being spoken, which was beautifully played by Mattie Hyland. While the words take precedence, the subtle changes in body language were extremely detailed. One can feel the anxiety that the body carries, and the slow easing up as the prose progresses and the weight of bottled up emotions is lifted, which shows a newfound strength. The show also made sure to integrate the audience through interactions in a comparatively light-hearted prose physicalized by Jess Lingard-Nutt.

A balanced mixture of poetry and prose conserved the overall momentum and variety. The literature complemented each other throughout the show, where the proeses' accessibility created a strong sense of empathy amongst the audience, while the poetry dug deeper into the emotions presented in the prose. Physical theatre was used effectively to create more powerful performances, with all of the movements well-placed and well-executed .

Even though the world is on a slow path towards an acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community, the show served as a solemn reminder that the internal struggle of emotions and mental health is far from over. Talking, at any point in a queer person's journey of self-acceptance and empowerment, can still be terrifying. The powerful performances and writing by Elliot Perlic brought these experiences to life and I look forward to the actors' and writer's upcoming projects.

2. Review of too long unsaid

I knew from watching that small snippet of the show in MatB that I would enjoy watching the show. From Elliot Perlic's fantastic work in creating an intimate and

poetic performance based on his personal life (which I most definitely would not have the courage to do!) to the cast's talented interpretation of it; I was enthralled by the piece the whole way through.

Moving past this, I must mention again how impressed I was by the actor's renditions as they made me sympathise with them, as well as making me laugh. For instance, I appreciated how they all made eye contact with members of the audience throughout their retelling. I thought it created the sensation of when a person tells a story to someone while they are having a conversation, resulting in the piece being all the more alluring. What is more, the dialogues between the cast members such as Mattie and Jodie Hodgson's intrigued me. Their interactions were so intimate that it motivated me to keep watching to find out what was going to happen next. It is almost like people watching. You sit there, watching as other people converse with each other, finding their business more appealing than minding your own. What I loved the most though was when all the actors started dancing to the abrupt music no one was expecting, re-enacting the exchanges made at parties between other boys.

Physical theatre was a very significant characteristic as it was present all the way through to the end. As I observed the actors move, I could see the distinct similarities between how they moved to how the performers in Frantic Assembly's productions moved. I had seen 'Things I Know to be True' a few years ago and was captivated by its use of physical theatre, so needless to say, I was excited by this.

Bertolt Brecht was an evident influence for 'Too Long Unsaid'. From the use of the lights staying turned on throughout the duration of the performance, to using direct audience address and the actors turning their backs to the audience (almost as if it were a metaphor of turning one's back to their sexuality), the performance was made to be very interesting to watch. Nonetheless, by having the cast turn their backs, I was not able to see what their facial reactions to their interactions with each other were. I felt as if I was missing out on what was occurring at times; especially in the beginning, when Mattie Hyland was sat hugging his knees.

Overlooking the only negative factor I saw in the performance, I loved how the entire performance was the personal journey Elliot's discovery of his own sexuality, and how he dealt with it, hence the title of the production, 'Too Long Unsaid'. The use of having each cast member wear an individual colour from the gay flag was very impactful to the narrative of the story, as them wearing something else would be unthinkable as it would not create the same effect. The private and taboo topic was the perfect choice for a performance due to its meaningfulness in addition to it rarely being included for fear of criticism.

3. 'Time ticks and we stole what tock's we could'

One voice. Six agents. *Too Long Unsaid* was a beautifully candid story; an amalgamation of both anthology and anecdote which detailed the writer, Elliot Perllac's journey of 'coming out' as gay. The

audience was taken down a winding path that explored the writer's tale, from discovering and comprehending the nuanced fluidity of sexuality, to talking openly with family and friends about it.

Upon entering the space, we find the cast scattered around the room, surrounding the seating which took on a layered, circular configuration. From where I was sitting, the performance was the perfect balance - intimate, but still in a position to see everything happening onstage. From this point, the configuration appeared almost maze-like, reflecting the narrative journey, which itself comprised many complex avenues to be explored. From where I was sitting it was perfectly effective in creating a physical representation of the poetry, using the bodies of the audience to form the network of passages, however I could see how a seat in the inner circle may be problematic - limiting the viewer who would perhaps have the misfortune of not seeing some of the well-choreographed, clockwork-like movement.

The piece was well-balanced, with the cast using their physicalities to highlight the peaks and troughs of Perlac's beautiful poetry, giving the performance a variety of momentum whilst driving forward the narrative. Moments of high-emotional intensity were countered with light-hearted moments of humour.

I would love to see this show developed, and perhaps brought into a space with more technical versatility. Whilst the cast and crew did incredibly well in utilizing the studio space, some moments would have been served well with better tech, such as the party scene which was unfortunately accompanied by quiet, tinny music. Though this was an unavoidable limitation, the cast still committed to their dancing and kept the energy of the piece up. The poor sound quality did not detract from this well-constructed scene.

The show dealt with issues facing the LGBTQ+ community adroitly, drawing attention to the insecurities, inequalities and difficulties that are still suffered even today. Well written, well performed and poignant, *Too Long Unsaid* was a captivating piece that the cast and crew should be immensely proud of.

Little Bear

3. Starsign Lightbulbs and other excerpts; an evening with Little Bear

When hearing rumours of a show desiring to question human nature, I was sceptical this multi-faceted and infinitely complex subject could be explored. This, coupled with the 1st year team and their directors Leah Nelson and Katherine Henry, excited and intrigued me for Little Bear. The publicity, designed and marketed by Cordelia Tarbrooke, sold a production concerned with the human place within the universe through focussing upon the eternal starsigns and starlight which loom above Earth, and have spectated human evolution since we emerged from the sea.

This focus became even more present when entering the Caryl Churchill Theatre, as the design of the space as a thrust stage with the rake struck me as a bold move, but I thought apt for an ensemble movement piece. The design choice of a lightbulb canopy suspended above the stage partially delivered upon the aesthetic marketed, however was something I wished to see them pushed further in quantity and quality so to really create a night sky, as lightbulbs are overused, so you have to push their use to it's limit and ingrain them within the piece. However, the use of the HOWIE lighting bar on the floor was an effective move, as throughout the performance it created an intimate space through lighting individuals from a different level, and supplied a piece of simple variety which emphasised the continuous, strenuous movement.

One takeaway of this show was it's use of the body, as the cast ruthlessly committed to a complex mixture of creating aural soundscapes of timbre whilst engaging physically as an ensemble to produce a tribalistic unit, which recreated the world they experienced, and the lives they lived. I was constantly in awe at the focus and professionalism of the ensemble, as each and every member maintained poise and accuracy throughout this extremely tough sequence of movement: every single cast member should hold their heads high and be proud of their performance, as you all successfully relied upon one another, and committed your minds and bodies to this show; Elena Strestik's Pina Bausch-esc repetition of throwing herself to the floor springs to mind.

However, this medium of performance relying heavily upon movement and voice became repetitive, tenuous and vague, as the production seemed to unravel and become lost in itself through losing focus upon it's research question. The excerpts of more naturalistic discussion of verbatim dreams and nightmares relieved this, as these stories provided variety in fear and humour (such as a supposed fear of rolly-polys), however in this format also repeating, it only added to the pervading vagueness. I believe that if their research question had been revisited, revised and simplified, it would have made this performance more accessible and ground it within

a specific stimulus; 'Human nature' is itself a vague and monolithic concept, and I believe to provide an answer to this in the way their original question stated is far too ambitious.

However, the duets between each performer injected new dynamics into this piece, as moments between both Adam Boshier and Olly Van-Hoeken, and Madeleine Carter and Lucas Soubiran, provided 2 moments of memorable tenderness which engaged through questioning who humans are, and our place together as spectators within an infinite universe.

2. Brave yet fragile

This term's Student Workshop's student production 'Little Bear' featured a cast of eight performers and a crew mainly built on first year students was a physical theatre and dance-based performance presenting to the audience ideas on human instinct. Co-Directors Katherine Henry and Leah Nelson bravely took on the season slot this term and quickly filled the cast with first and second years respectively. All those onstage wore skin coloured clothing, went on without shoes and built up an atmosphere of sound through using nothing but stamping and voice.

Directing the Student Workshop season production can be challenging enough when carefully mapping, directing and designing a whole devised piece for the slot. However, to do this all as first year at University is far from an easy task for which both directors should be widely commended for. Although it can be admitted that there was often a variation of physical ability throughout the cast, every performer was taught a tight base layer of movement and style allowing the progression of narrative to emerge through the ensemble's physicality. The academic research behind styles of movement was evident to the audience in the high-quality piece presented onstage. Stand out performances by Ollie Van Hoeken and Elizabeth Lindsay led the performance beautifully with a precision on every movement made onstage which was beautiful to see from audience perspective.

One of the most difficult factors when blocking a performance in the Caryl Churchill theatre is battling with a very broad and yet shallow stage when using the rake in performance. This challenge was overcome by staging the audience in a wide thrust arrangement. Therefore, the performance managed to reach out to a much wider variety of the space. Furthermore, the use of Howie light laying on the back of the stage made for an illustrious effect highlighting movement of specific body parts which would not usually be considered by the audience. This use of lighting proved beautiful and reminded me of the works of Robert Wilson. The lights hanging above the stage representing the constellation of little bear was a clever touch but, in all honesty, it failed to provide a use nor give itself a reason for being there. This form of artificial light also took away from the organic nature of the performance the ensemble had worked so hard to build throughout the piece with the use of soundscaping and fluidity.

Whilst it is true that there are definitely creases and sections which may have been polished and adapted throughout this piece, the performance itself was a very easy

watch due to the fluidity and unity seen onstage by the tightknit ensemble. With continued non-verbal communication and a majority of a strong quality of movement throughout, it was clear to the audience that through strong direction and creative process the cast had fantastic performing chemistry and trust in one another. This was of course very touching and professional. One section which would need to be addressed if the piece was ever to go further would be the verbatim dialogue within the piece. This for me missed the mark as the emphasis was rested on what the performers were saying rather than a key element of verbatim, who's words the performer is actually speaking. A further dialogue discrepancy about a performer being 'mental' as well as the repeated pushing down of a female

performer by a male performer seemed unintentionally politicised for an a-political piece of performance.

Overall, this performance was a brave and endearing piece veering away from patterns which have previously occurred in Student Workshop performances. Although the piece would have benefitted from more hours to work with second eyes on the performance from dramaturgs and academics, the piece provided to the audience was strong. From ensemble work down to the organic sounds and music of the piece, as an audience member I felt myself constantly intrigued and impressed by moments of precision and great fragility even in frantic moments.

1. Little Bear Review

Little Bear is an ambitious physical theatre piece exploring the depths of human subconscious and man's desire for connection. The play uses mimicry repeatedly; within the opening scenes, a 'leader' figure stamps their feet, eventually leading others to mirror their actions. These characters are all named after constellations and stars, emphasizing Hydra's (Played that Maddie Carter) reflective speech in a later scene, when she cleverly notes that stars as symbols of guidance. Stars are a motif throughout, with 'constellations' being suspended above the actors, perhaps symbolizing the association of the character's dreams with the directions of their lives. The 'leader' character is symbolic of the blue 'north star' that guides not only the other stars, but the physical sequences also. This leadership role is shared between multiple characters and could symbolize a lack of certainty in our everyday lives, as there is no clear direction we should take. In a way, the play portrays the innate human desire for leadership and guidance that the stars provide in times of turmoil, in this case, the turmoil being the characters' nightmares.

I found the use of physical theatre interspersed with the dream discussions particularly effective- in several situations the physical sequences are indeed abstract references to the dreams the characters discuss. For example, in a physical scene of chaos, Cassiopeia asks the audience to choose their favorite shopping center, before later discussing a dream of her going to Tesco's. Cephus tells of a dream where he punched someone, and we later see a physical sequence of him in a fight and losing.

The use of physical theatre is extremely effective in portraying the theme of human connection. The use of sound cleverly introduces the theme of non-verbal connection. In the opening sequence, the characters each create unique and interlocking noises that come together to establish a scene of tranquility. The singing of the female characters was particularly noticeable, their beautiful harmonies symbolizing the intimate relationships between them. The play not only explores the beauty of this connection, but also the struggles to obtain it. In a powerful sequence, Orion tries over and over again to hold back his lover as she tries to escape to be with another woman. Eventually, he has to let her go, creating a poignant tone; we feel his desperation not to lose the woman he loves, but his desire for her to be happy- with or without him. This journey to a harmonious relationship is also prominent in the scenes wherein the characters discuss their dreams. Initially, they talk over and interrupt each other, causing jarring transitions between their stories. However, as the play progresses, they listen to what they each have to say and interact with each other, making for a more meaningful interaction.

Overall, I found this play to be an entirely unique and thoroughly enjoyable experience, rich with meaning and powerful performances.

Dark Stage

1. The Dark (St)Age review

Attempting to review a show set on alienating its audience, and more specifically, its critics, initially seemed like an impossible task. How can you successfully critique a play that relentlessly critiques you? Statements such as 'Who are the critics?', 'If I'm frank, they are not very intelligent' and (my personal favourite), 'They're limited people', brought a smile to my lips but simultaneously made me hyperconscious of my notepad and pen. Making the audience hyperconscious, however, was no doubt the aim of this obsessively self-reflective play.

The play's disregard for the barrier between actor and audience was evident upon entering the theatre: a screen at the back of the stage showed a live feed from a camera placed upstage left. Literally putting a mirror up to the audience and forcing them to confront their role as viewers resulted in an uncomfortable atmosphere from the get-go. The play's efforts to make the audience examine themselves seemed inexorable as the fourth wall was shattered by Ethan Chappell-Mason's first monologue, a polemic poking fun at theatre and theatregoers.

Chappell-Mason's character acted as a quasi-dictator, with Thomas Price nailing the role of gormless underling. The ensemble's subservience was depicted through physical theatre, with Chappell-Mason as master puppeteer, controlling the cast's

movements and darting around the stage like an ape released from its cage. The cast should be praised for their incredible stamina and the range of their movements which ranged from balletic to jerky and spasmodic.

Additionally the play's dialogue was delivered with conviction and Eloise Harper's caustic monologues overflowed with venom and world-weariness. The play even had the audacity to explicitly address its abstruseness: Harper's cry of 'You haven't understood shit of what's going on' led to some hesitant tittering from the audience, perhaps indicating sheepish assent. I enjoyed the play's self-awareness and its painfully self-conscious antics successfully highlighted the inherent flimsiness and artificiality of theatre.

A particular highlight was the final scene where each performer seemed to go through a painful re-birth, which, in my eyes, symbolised a phoenix-like renaissance of theatre. Levels were utilised to great effect as the ensemble began on the floor and after many agonizing movements, came to their feet. The stage also gradually became lighter, effectively underscoring the transition from a bleak past to a hopeful future.

Despite all of the critic-bashing in this play, the thing I found most disturbing was the final bow. There was no blackout or break to delineate the real world from the theatrical one: we witnessed the actors transition from their roles into their own personalities. I felt that denying us the comfort of a dark stage was another way of tampering with the unspoken contract between audience and actor. Nevertheless, giving such a turbulent show a harmonious, optimistic ending was a brilliant choice and allowed the audience to leave the theatre with something more than just a cold sense of meta-induced dread.

2. Review of The Dark Stage

The Dark Stage is equally terrifying as it is gorgeous. All of the aesthetic choices fill the Boilerhouse space with a gritty, uncomfortable musk. I would have loved to have seen a more complex utilisation of multimedia rather than just a projection of the performance from an alternate angle. Use of propaganda imagery, styled specifically for this piece, may add a layer of explanation for the more complex structural elements of the writing which are not as obvious in performance.

The overall aesthetic serves this performance immaculately. Shadow play is used with distinct purpose, the 'Puppeteer' of the imagined universe is cast over the ensemble. Costume works coherently. The focus of the cast is unmoving and unnerving. They visibly look through you in their state of pure zen.

The most striking element of this performance is undoubtedly the physicalisation. It is stellar. From the inclusion of Commedia dell'arte, to the Laban and Feldenkrais movement sequences, Lorenzo Di Credico's stylistic decisions are insane yet perfect. I commend the cast for absolutely giving themselves over to the work. They throw themselves about the space. Their strength and control is evident from the breathless manner in which they push themselves through the movement games, sweat pouring down their faces. They force themselves to their extremities, surpassing the threshold of their fatigue to continually present their bodies in an exceptional manner.

The play is uncompromising in its approach. It is unhinged, yet entirely controlled. Any bursts of chaos are measured with absolute precision which drives this performance to its very edges and captivates at each and every turn. Segments snap with a gong sound, separated episodically and each narrating a new aspect of this disturbed world unfolding before us. The worldbuilding is consistent, clean and fantastically frightening. This is a play about civilisation, about human evolution and our current climate of incomprehensible disarray due to corruption in higher powers. It is a piece which encapsulates so much of the darkest aspects of modern society with eloquence and flare.

This is one of the (if not the) best things to come out of the Student Workshop in my experience of their work. *The Dark Stage* sets a precedent for other SW affiliated companies as an example of the vivid potential harboured in intelligent practice and dedicated actors. The writing is ingenious. While the process may be one of pure exhaustion, the results are evident in the brilliance of the final product. I am enthralled that this level of theatre exists in the other standard student shows.

3. It is with the greatest regret that I am writing this review... or, is it only fuelling your personal remorse for asking for one?

In an age of mediatised representations, corrupt political regimes and substantial hierarchical differences, *The Dark Stage* attempted to interrogate the capitalist nature of theatre by putting such bourgeois entertainment in the spotlight. All puns included, this satirical production effortlessly challenged our political understanding of theatre through its Marxist commentary, shunning theatre critics for their money-making profession. Lorenzo Di Credico's script and visual performance techniques interrogated our cultural appreciation of the art form, as he directly put his audience to the test. Through the projected image of the audience onto the back wall of the stage, the play's quote: "art is its own semblance, the shadow of our society", became the hypothesis. We had to be ready to look within ourselves in order to appreciate the theatre before us.

A loud Symphonic Gong provided a structure for the piece. The sound-effect became the ruler of the stage, whilst also enabling the breakdown of the ensemble from their initial embodiment of Commedia dell'arte stock characters. The sound-effect caused the ensemble to scurry frantically into a line and take up the stance of their character. This regime-like sequence, and the over-the-top gestural movement of each character reflected the performance techniques of the European tradition and its attempts at representing stereotypical societal roles. The gong sounded multiple times throughout the performance to signify a new scene that showcased a juxtaposing physical quality to the previous scene. For example, there was a clear contrast between the commedia dell'arte sequences and Di Credico's other movement influences. He began to show the breakdown of the ensemble when the performers started circling Therese (Eloise Harper), who sat centre. They started to pass a rolled-up cloth between them, signifying her baby. Throughout this sequence, the passing of the baby became less tactical. They threw it around, breaking out of their circular journey into individual rhythms around the space. From what started as a reference to one of Meyerhold's techniques, developed into a compelling exploration of the individual performer. The contrast between this and Commedia's stock characters provided an ironic experience of restricted appreciation. As soon as the performers were free, so were our imaginations, as the power of suggestion was exploited through the actors' bodies. This was quickly swallowed by the sound of the gong and the scurrying frenzy back to a reality of strict movement. Although frustrating for the audience, Di Credico successfully managed to highlight how theatre is restrained by power and control, by limiting our enjoyment and ripping away our imaginations.

Di Credico split the performance space into three locations; the audience, the performers and the digital screen. Although the projection could have closed-up on the audience to make it clear that we were under speculation, the effect caused us to be in conversation with ourselves. This intermedial performance initiated a dialogue between the visceral and the virtual. The separate images of the space created an overwhelming excess of sensations; I was aware of myself internally and visually. According to Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink and Sigrid Merx, the effect of our own digital presence and the multitude of images replicate 'the cultural conditions of our time [which is] the endurance of the chaos that surrounds us' (219). Therefore, by incorporating the digital in performance, *The Dark Stage* put its audience under the microscope; we had to filter through the chaotic images in order to find the truth within ourselves. The art onstage became the "shadow of our society", leaving us to question what theatre is in a world of false representations.