

Review: Today I Killed My Very First Bird

By Sara Lamerton

***Today I Killed My Very First Bird*, Theatre Royal Plymouth**

How to review Voodoo Monkey's (Jason Brownlee and Lee Hart) *Today I Killed My Very First Bird*? Something I began contemplating within minutes of the show starting, and continued to chew over on the drive home. How to do justice to what I witnessed? Where would I even begin in accurately describing - particularly to those who weren't there in that moment - the sheer passionate, provocative, painfully poignant 50 minutes that unfolded.

From the outset, *Today I Killed My Very First Bird* isn't like anything I've previously seen. Long before the real juicy bits begin, passive interaction, snappy judgements, and childish curiosity ignites in the audience as the cast of five sit on stage, immersed in their own worlds. And, if you're anything like me, and saw the show this time round, or will see it in its future incarnation, that curiosity may stay with you long after the final question is asked.

We follow 24 hours in the life of Brownlee's intensely chaotic Lewisham gangster character as he completes his karmic lifecycle: a painfully traumatic, journey defining childhood; a complicated, fraught present day; and a tantalising choice for the next life. Along the way, we encounter his addict mother (Sue Raphael), whose last resort for a viable vein will have you squirming in your seat. As well as the superbly vulgar, sex-obsessed Bernie, (Amber L Jacobs), the unscrupulously opportunistic, shag first - think later, Joe (Sham Ali) and a variety of other immoral, repugnant, cowardly figures (Brandon Howard). All of whom have a vital role to play in the decline, epiphany, demise, and redemption of Brownlee's Devine-finding gangster.

Brash bravado and profanity momentarily veil the complex, frequently confronting themes *Today I Killed My Very First Bird* presents as the semi-biographical inner child fights to be heard. His subconscious desperately tries to connect with simpler joys, to fond memories, to love, and to those universal truths buried deep underneath the hatred formed from the ashes of his long standing familial traumas, childhood abuse, and chronic addiction, before his soul abruptly completes its journey on earth.

With their three-day run in The Drum billed as an early work-in-progress preview, accompanied by an audience Q&A session after, *Today I Killed My Very First Bird* is the collaborative brain/heart/soul child of Voodoo Monkey's talented duo; and the feedback was pretty unanimous on the night: it's brutal, relentless, stomach-churning, inappropriately humorous, and don't change a thing.



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Serendipity brought the pair together after Lee witnessed Jason's unleashed poetic talent during the interval of a Japanese Samurai version of Macbeth! Teaming up, they never looked back. Filled with intrigue to find out where this raw inspiration could go, they joined forces with Theatre Royal Plymouth Lab Association Company to create Voodoo Monkey's first, but certainly not last, production. And, although part fiction, it's clear *Today I Killed My Very First Bird* is born from a very personal journey. Thorns squeeze around the heart of every elaborate, cleverly woven piece of dialogue, asking some big questions about the nature of our time here.

It's a triumph to see what happens when raw sparks are nurtured into roaring flames.



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