

Review: Sorry, You're Not A Winner

By Sara Lamerton

***Sorry, You're Not A Winner*, Theatre Royal Plymouth**

Sorry, You're Not A Winner, written by Samuel Bailey, produced by Paines Plough and Theatre Royal Plymouth in association with University of Plymouth, tells the story of two childhood friends Liam (Eddie-Joe Robinson) and Fletch (Kyle Rowe) as they stand on the precipice of change: the familiarity, comfort, and constraints of childhood morphing into the daunting new world of young adulthood.

Fletch, the hilarious, endearingly loveable “chav” is reluctant to let go of his best friend, Liam, who, ‘against the odds’, has secured a place at Oxford University. Fletch, filled with jealousy and fear, desperate for the relationship to stay as it’s always been, struggles to envisage a life without his best friend. Liam, on the other hand, has different plans. Although memories of life at home tug on his heartstrings, he must follow the opportunity of a lifetime and see where the boundaries beyond his birthplace lead. Yet, before their fates irreversibly pull in different directions, Fletch relinquishes his anxiety and anger, gifting Liam an unused big money scratchcard; a gesture meaning more than mere words can convey.

We then follow the pair at crucial points on their journeys over the next eight years, through university graduations and prison sentences, discovering new and old loves, to babies on the way, and climbing the corporate ladder. And, although on the surface Liam has everything going for him, he suffers from a different kind of prison sentence as he battles feelings of shame and uncertainty, desperately trying to figure out exactly who he is and where his place now lies.

When writing *Sorry, You're Not A Winner* Bailey wanted its themes to be relatable, and they certainly are. There are fundamental truths we can all connect with on some level. Watching the pair grow and contract, I found myself emotionally attached to both characters as they explored their individual dilemmas. Bailey transported me back to a time in my own past as I recalled similarly mixed and chaotic feelings, leaving my home alongside long standing, but complicated friendships, to discovering my place in life, and the psychological uncertainty that your 20’s bring: the pain, the joy, the highs, the

all consuming lows, the broken loves, and the friendships rediscovered.

Bailey, having previously spoken about the shame he felt surrounding his own background, clearly now unapologetically embraces his authentic self by telling the stories of people and places that mean something to him. This particular internal struggle, perfectly told through Liam's character, highlights a journey of self-acceptance, culminating in the final scene as the friends frankly discuss the question Fletch once asked: why did Liam stay if he wasn't happy? "Because fuck them," he states; raging against a cultural and political system that keeps people in their place; keeps people like them locked out, scared of getting it wrong and fearful of not fitting in.

Sorry, You're Not A Winner expertly and humorously confronts some universal social issues, questioning the benefits and pitfalls of social mobility, of forging your own path despite the pressure to do what everyone else around you is doing, to the trappings of expectations, and the noose of our longings for a better life.

At its heart, *Sorry, You're Not A Winner* is an intimate and tender portrayal of male friendship which endures despite the odds. Swept along by the tides of fate until they're finally reunited by their love and acceptance for one another, and, of course, that scratchcard!

Sometimes to grow you have to leave things behind, but the people and places meant for us will always return.

Sorry, You're Not A Winner is on in The Drum until 12th March.