

Review: Solo Voices: Facial

By Sara Lamerton

***Solo Voices: Facial* at Theatre Royal Plymouth**

Abstract, nostalgic, and highly memorable, Chris White's dark comedy *Facial*, kicked off the Theatre Royal's Solo Voices micro-festival in The Drum last night. This daring and sublimely unique play first created back in 2016 before Chris' time as a Lab Associate at TRP was initially showcased at Edinburgh fringe, and has now been reworked into a bigger, better version of its former self.

If you were lucky enough, as I was, to catch Chris' last show *Moist Moist Moist* then you'll already be aware of this young artist's incredible, unassuming poetic storytelling talent and his impressive command of the stage. Absorbing audiences into the worlds he creates, his sharp cultural and interpersonal observations are promptly dissected and spat back at you with a geeky, childlike Frank Spencer charm (for all of us old enough to remember that character) and a conversely furious passion as he switches between the two styles with ease and grace.

Could you live without a face? Now that's a question to ponder. An idea to muse over. A concept to pick apart. A narrative to build an entire show around. On the surface the opening inquiry that underpins the entire solo performance seems nonchalant, trivial, silly even. Yet, as Chris weaves his magic through each scene and crazy character (God love and have mercy on poor Debbie), from memories and personal reflections, to every abstract, sometimes bizarre, often dark, but always hilarious take we see how important and diverse this question truly is.

Personal and reflective, Chris uses his natural gifts and unique style to look back in his own obscured rear view mirror, sharply recalling things long forgotten: those blurry photos from Boots, a time before recycling was a thing, the trauma, emotional scars, and residual self-hatred antibiotic resistant teen acne left etched on your skin, and a world before the faces of now 'irrelevant' Madame Tussauds legends were melted down and replaced with the faces of Tik Tok influencers.

However, *Facial* doesn't just concern itself with the past and what is long gone, but what is yet to come: where will our faces lead, and all the experiences they will bear witness to as they shed, renew, and ultimately decay in front of our very eyes day after day, year after year.

As well as Chris' exceptional use of storytelling and pinpoint observations, the show is filled with fun face facts and physical, interactive theatre involving quite a few twixes and a giant, green and, in one very specific area, gungy face that is used to add an extra unexpected layer to this crazy, multilayered, and at times unhinged world.



Blink and you'll miss it, but if you're quick you can catch *Facial* in The Drum until 19th May. It's not a show you will easily forget anytime soon and, in my opinion, is a fitting way to commence a fortnight of powerful one-person performances that wouldn't be possible without the amazing work of TRP and the creative talents it supports.



Supported using public funding by
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