

Review: Solo Voices: Swim

By Sara Lamerton

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

Have you immersed yourself in the expansive icy-blue world on your doorstep yet? Perhaps lockdown inspired you to find out exactly what all the fuss is about. Or you watched the bobble-hatted swimmers sinking an inch of their exposed flesh at a time into the murky depths with trepidation all while giggling, sometimes screaming, but returning time after time. Or maybe you're in awe of the slick, neoprene head-under-gang, gliding through the waves like a warm knife through cold butter. And, if you haven't indulged yet, why not? What's your excuse for not slipping into a little skin tight number to feel the cleansing, rejuvenating qualities freely on offer to anyone that will embrace them when you're living within a stone's throw of the UK's first National Marine Park?

That's where we meet Liz Richardson: about to take her first intrepid dunk after escaping the mechanical, soulless life of London. Long disconnected from fond childhood frolics in the lakes, little does she know she's about to embark on a powerful personal and collective community journey, with the joyful reconnecting to a youthful love of water at the heart of it all.

Swim, written, created, performed by Liz Richardson, and co-produced between Theatre By The Lake & LR Productions in association with imPOSSIBLE Producing, makes a splash at TRP as part of their Solo Voices micro-festival. Having successfully toured across the country, Plymouth, a hub for wild swimming since the pandemic took hold, concludes this particular leg of *Swim's* current run. And, as the play is all about connection, community, and (funnily-enough) swimming, Liz swims daily with people at each tour location.

As a post-lockdown keen outdoor swimmer myself, I jumped at the chance to meet Liz before reviewing the show. After a small Google Maps confusion over the most iconic landmark in Plymouth, Smeaton's Tower, we eventually crossed paths for a pre-show swim at Tinside. Thankfully the sun shone as we ventured into the perfectly crisp water, chatting about the show (no spoilers though), Liz's inspiration, and our mutual love of splashing about like a big kid before saying goodbye ahead of the first night performance.

Swim centres around a small, close knit community who initially bond through the pub but end up being baptised in the soul cleansing non-alcoholic, highly addictive waters around them. We follow Liz as she finds joy again, begins sharing life with people who she isn't initially enamoured by, yet fiercely loves through the toughest times of their lives.

Grief, a central theme of this powerful and moving play, is explored through the story of the inconsolably tragic loss of children taken too soon by a seemingly cruel and senseless world. Liz, Lisa, and Sarah battle with the complexity of death from different perspectives: a sister, a mother, a friend. Spiralling out of control, Liz watches her gin loving, crazy texting friend Lisa grapple with the hand life has dealt her family; clawing at its edges, frantically using the water as an escape, a way to avoid drawing in sorrow and the guilt of being the only sister not to lose a child.

Swim doesn't just look at grief from the perspective of those suffering, but asks deeper questions of us all about how we may support, dismiss, or even cross over the street in the vain attempt to avoid a sting from those tricky tentacles of the cruel, yet inevitable reality of this fragile, fleeting existence.

However, it's not all bad news. Life doesn't simply take and not give. Even in the midst of insurmountable suffering, just when it seems like no reason to continue living exists, you could find yourself pulling your costume to one side, peeing on a stick, and being blown away by the two blue lines staring at you as new life sprouts from the frozen winter ground.

Of course, *Swim* certainly is about swimming; about the unconstrained freedom found in that glorious life-giving substance, but it's also about what comes to settle on dry land: community, strength, resolve and tenderness.

Swim is clearly a very personal tribute to those in Liz's life, but also reflects upon the wider threads woven between us all. It invites the audience to delve into our hearts to quietly, reverently consider how to be more compassionate, more accepting, more loving to those closest; to understand and make allowances for the unmentioned pain we all experience and try to bury at times; to make space for the simple things which bring joy, love and support into this world. *Swim* calls for us to tread gently, to be fiercer in our acceptance of the one life we share, to value the people in front of us while we have the opportunity, but to find purpose, passion, and to honour one another in the aftermath of often senseless tragedies that could so easily befall any one of us without warning in the darkness of night.

Catch this funny, clever, heartwarming show in The Drum before it resurfaces on 26th May <https://theatreroyal.com/whats-on/solo-voices-swim>.