

Review: Every Word Was Once An Animal

By Sara Lamerton

***Every Word Was Once An Animal*, Theatre Royal Plymouth**

Where were you on 5th April? Can't remember? Well, you certainly weren't at the opening night of *Every Word Was Once An Animal*. Because it never happened. Or did it? Who knows!

Mysterious before it begins, even the play's description is set to confuse long before the cast step foot on stage. And the confusion doesn't end there. If you're used to linear stories and clear direction, *Every Word Was Once An Animal* certainly won't provide that. However, if you gravitate towards the unusual, towards things that leave you questioning exactly what it all meant, then this might just be the perfect show for you.

Every Word Was Once An Animal by visionary Belgium theatre company Ontroerend Goed runs in The Drum until 27 June before they return to Edinburgh Fringe in August. Dancing the thin line between truth and lies, this cryptic play has the audience simultaneously laughing and unsure of where they're being taken as the show (mis)guides you from one seemingly disjointed scene to the next.

Known for their confrontational style, and shows which are sometimes described as "uncomfortable", *Every Word Was Once An Animal* certainly has elements of both, although perhaps in lesser amounts than some of their previous overtly controversial performances. Goed certainly revels in the audience being confused, led astray, laughing from sheer awkwardness, and being given no firm answers as to their wider motivation. The troupe's style would make many squirm in their seats, while others rejoice in a totally different approach to theatre.

One thing's certain, though, there's nowhere to hide from the talented cast's intensity and genuine love of what they're doing on stage. Their personalities and likeability shine through, making an hour of weirdness disappear in the blink of an eye.

Several themes and symbols run throughout the play. Like an onion, our existence has many layers. As we peel each scene away over the hour, more and more layers are exposed until you're met by the core, which is simply another one to explore. Each layer is like the various characters presented to delight, amuse and confuse you - both those on stage and the more obscure, abstract characters woven in from the past and future as we meet them at various stages of their life. And, of course, that curtain scene. You certainly won't forget the curtain scene in a hurry. Or the bit that's not the curtain scene, but you think is the curtain scene. I know, confusing!



The show ends much like it begins: only this time asking the question about how a show should conclude. What makes a good ending? When do we know when a performance has come full circle? It might take you a while to get it, to know exactly what to do or why. But when you do, you will certainly reflect upon what you've just witnessed.



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