

Edinburgh Festival Fringe Review – W.R.E.N.S

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Venue 18. Sweet Grassmarket: City 1 Apex City Hotel.

Without a doubt one of the hot-ticket certainties for this year's Fringe has to be the quaintly named Tiny Teapot Theatre's production of Edinburgh born, ex-Wren, Anne V. McGravie's W.R.E.N.S.

Set in their Orkney WW2 Nissan hut for the 'Duration' seven, young and older, girls have to contemplate the ambiguous implications of the worst-kept secret:-that Peace is about to be declared.

A war over, but personal conflicts are only about to commence. How will their fortunes and status in 'Civvy Street' unfold? The irony being that for many of them Service life has been a liberating experience. Squabbles, spats and catty asides constantly resonate as a release from the fractious minutiae of their claustrophobic dormitory existence. Meanwhile, the withdrawn Dawn, often the target of their snipes, is happier to escape in to her pulp-fiction romantic novels. But she has a bitter secret that we gradually begin to appreciate, and the consequences of which impact on all of them as events unfold in parallel with the announcement of 'Hostilities Ended.'

The characters are sharply formed and insightfully cast with sincerity and convincing empathy. Each has her own dynamic, though we are often drawn into responding to events through the eyes of recent recruit, seventeen years old (she insists it's seventeen & a half!) Megan, whose sprightly innocence sometime grates on the older girls. But, she too, has her childhood ghosts and realises that, just as her clumsily

grasps at forming friendships might bear fruition, her naivety leaves her floundering at the realisation of Dawn and Chelsea's predicament.

The set-piece songs eschew any kitsch, nostalgia romanticism with the setting to music of one of the cast's ex-Wren grandmother's poem, 'The Great Illusion' a heart-stopping multi-harmony treasure.

There's a sombre, reflective but life-affirming essence to this production that is bed-rocked in sympathetic, but never sentimental scripting, realised through convincing characterisation. A show that could stand your attention. Strongly Recommended. (Age 14+ as a guidance.)

(Editor's note – John attended the show in the company of Edinburgh resident May Kennedy, herself a former WREN. Here is the proof!)

