

Fringe Review : Beef (*****)

✘ The prospect of having to climb numerous flights of stairs to be shuffled into a slightly sweaty shoe-box of a performance space by polite but clearly flustered venue staff is truly what the Edinburgh Fringe Festival is all about.

The ambient noise leakage from other productions or outside sirens might even be intuited as part of the production – you just don't know. One has to be on one toes with these young theatre groups these days! But Nottingham New Theater's contemporary drama, 'Beef' is something special. Little or nothing can distract the audience from soon being totally immersed in its perplexing, insightful, consuming cryptic narrative.

Rachel has to deal with a cohort of seemingly dysfunctional uninvited guests at the same time as desperately needing to escape from a fragmenting relationship with Mark. Notwithstanding the tedious distraction of an Apocalyptic deluge of rain sweeping across Britain. None of this is helped by Mark's anxious need to explain his seemingly prophetic dream about a dry cows in the rain. Confused? Worried? You should be because they're very close behind you. Let alone what else. Tensions rise as do the flood waters lapping against the doorstep.

This is an intelligent, perceptive and energetic production, bristling with tension off-set by aptly timed comic relief. It shrewdly avoids any messianic symbolism, although a nod to Noah's Ark cannot fail to resonate. Is the greater threat what lurks outside or their potential disintegration in the prospect of confronting it? The use of narrative mime-transitions and articulacy of facial expressionism really mark out the cast's interpretive dramatic capabilities. The denouement tableau chimes with ambiguous poignancy. To use the words 'Experimental Theatre' might have many running for the

hills, but Arthur's Seat has been there, and will remain, for Millennia. Your chance to experience a play of gifted frisson is but transitory. Carpe Diem.

Venue 348, soco, Studio 3. Chambers Street. (PG)