

Theatre review: The Incredible Adventures of See-Thru Sam (****)



Fifteen-year-old Sam McTannan is a superhero. As See-Thru Sam, he can be assured of a quiet life, passing unobserved and dodging any insults hurled in his direction (writing them all down in a book takes away their power to hurt). But when his parents are suddenly killed in a car crash, he finds his superpowers have deserted him, leaving him plainly visible to all around him – mostly do-gooders wanting to express their concern – but also exposed to the messy teen problems of infatuation, love and casual bullying. And with his blossoming friendship with Violet Morgana developing into something more serious, he needs all the superpowers he can muster to face the wrath of her boyfriend Chunk.

Johnny McKnight both writes and directs the latest offering from Glasgow-based theatre company Random Accomplice, and it's a tight, pacey show, high on belly laughs but equally unafraid to stray into darker territory.

Performances from the three-strong cast are uniformly compelling. James Mackenzie and Julie Brown (who also produces) have their work cut out playing multiple characters – from block-headed school bully Chunk to bumbling domestic science teacher Mrs Timmins – but they rise to the challenge with relish. And James Young paints a pleasingly complex picture of Sam, sometimes gawky and naive, yet at other times possessed of a determined optimism.

The show's real impact, though, comes from the seamless integration between the live actors and cartoon-like video animations by Jamie Macdonald, which provide vibrant backdrops

and create some visually stunning effects – a poignant dance while the world dissolves into glittering stars brings a tear to the eye.

It's a mark of the show's bravery that it doesn't shy away from difficult subjects, and the play's surprisingly bleak yet poignant conclusion only serves to reinforce McKnight's suggestions that all was not well with the apparently idyllic (and superhero-obsessed) family life snatched away from Sam. If it weren't for McKnight's gleefully potty-mouthed script, you might be mistake it for a family show (and it's undeniably teen-friendly), but his subtle refusal to cast things in black and white ensures that it feels like a far more adult affair.

[The Incredible Adventures of See-Thru Sam](#) continues at the [Traverse Theatre](#) until 20 October