

Edinburgh Festival Fringe – Waist



The Fiddler's Elbow (Venue 71) 12-24th August 3.15pm (1 hour)

Doing plays how they used to be done – loudly and in pubs.

WAIST is a new one-act play by the Royal Court Young Writer Toby Parker-Rees, who has been shortlisted for the RSC Other Prize for playwriting. It is about satyrs, kebabs, and not being alone. It was written to be performed for free in pubs – lively audiences make us try harder, and nobody gets left out. Toby explains: 'A while ago I went to one of those sit-down concerts for elderly bands, and watched Rod Argent and The Yardbirds handle songs about sex and drugs the way George Osborne would a Big Mac. It was depressing, but it gave me a thought. A lot of what had been lost between the sixties and that performance has been lost in theatres too.'

Everyone is quiet, now, and if it's rubbish we wait until we're outside or online to complain. But Shakespeare started off in tavern theatre, and Greek tragedy was born in the bacchanal. At their peaks Shakespeare and Euripides were still writing for drunk peasants and heckling gentry; they always had to be good enough to shut everyone up. Silence was earnt, not expected. Tame audiences make it too easy to be boring.'

There's another side to this – Toby has epilepsy, so it's particularly important to him that there's room for people physically unable to sit still and shut up. We've been involved with productions where actors and audience members were furious that disabled children were loudly enjoying the show – which is as pathetic as it is unpleasant. We don't want to do work that leaves anyone out.

So WAIST has a story onstage – with a couple breaking up, and a satyr, and a kebab seller – but there’s another one offstage. The satyr, a Johnny Vegas with hooves, spends the second half clownishly trying to make the audience more raucous. It gets messier and messier, louder and louder, until everyone’s doing something. We want the whole audience on their feet by the end, so we can cheat a standing ovation out of them.