

Edinburgh Festival Fringe REVIEW – An Actor's Lament

<http://www.theedinburghreporter.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/actorslament250.jpg> Steven Berkoff, thespian institution, or national treasure? Both such dubious accolades would appall him I'm sure, and in this latest play at the Assembly Hall, *An Actor's Lament*, he presents an eviscerating attack on the modern theatre machine behind both, and much else besides.

This is a highly entertaining fire and brimstone verse fuelled tirade against the agents of theatrical mediocrity – worthy of the pen of Alexander Pope. The stage has been Berkoff's enduring love, and so the theatre is the dark glass through which he attacks all that is base in the modern drama, film and TV world. No-one in luvvie-land escapes Berkoff's amusing wrath as his three louche thespians debate the state of things, – critics, trashy 'fingers on the pulse of mediocrity' producers and non-acting directors all being prime targets for the erudite and angry fire of his tongue.

Writers have a slightly easier time of it, being mauled and mangled by the former accused, while actors of course are fated to be saints and despairingly salacious sinners. The sting in Berkoff's writing retains all its delicious poison with some wonderful explosions from the king of flash, and all three characters are brought to far larger than life in the complacent aura of accomplished theatre types – with Jay Benedict and Andree Bernard delightfully sharing the burden of bile. But yes this is satire, so tongues are firmly in cheeks, and in truth everyone gets a very decent pasting; it's the audience, quite rightly, who are left to decide who is best left in charge of the wounded art of live theatre.

But there is more to this than that. Berkoff, his heart in the classics, his older actor's soul in torment at the state of things at this raging end of a (truly) legendary career, seems troubled by mortality, by the dying of the light and the transience of theatre and reputation. He hints at a touching desperation deep in the thespian (and maybe also merely human) soul; to be loved, to be creative, to be respected, indeed not to have to die at all, – oh to be immortal like an Olivier, like a Shakespeare...

The final moments, when the actor contemplates theatrical and actual death, drifting from Lear and Prospero to a typically Berkoffian lungful of imaginary cigar smoke and blackout, – signifying everything – are breathtakingly simple, effective, and purely, uniquely, Berkoff.

Four Stars

Ade Morris

Submitted by [Ade Morris](#)