

Edinburgh Festival Fringe

REVIEW Losing the Plot ****



‘Losing The Plot’

New Town Theatre, George Street

Four stars ****

John Godber’s *Losing The Plot*, playing at the revived and brilliant New Town Theatre on George Street makes a searing comedy case from the first moments, assisted by two superb and touching performances from Steve Huison (*Brassed Off*) and Susan Cookson (*Emmerdale*). The laughs range wide with some lovely set-pieces and one-liners worthy of Godber at his best.

The central couple, Jack and Sally, he a dedicated art teacher, she running a flower shop, both wondering where youthful idealism went, are bedeviled by life and recession driven education cuts. Jumpy Jack cracks under the pressure, disappears for three months and throws the marriage into crisis. So far so soap opera – but what happens next is a revelation; Mumsy Sally is enraged by her solitary experience, writes a comedy book about her hopeless absent husband and lets everyone read the draft.

When Jack returns from three months living in a car he is appalled that the neighbours all now know he keeps a copy of ‘Hot Sex Tips’ and ‘What Caravan’ on the bedside table – and so the fireworks start going off. With Jack in the doghouse the power in the relationship revolves, Sally is feted by a publisher looking for a popular hit and tempted into the high life, Jack takes over the flower shop, and presto, we have a well made play.

But in this neat structure Godber folds an arresting (if at first slightly contrived) debate about the nature and value of

creativity to people in the face of the current cuts. Do we need the arts, and why, or are we been driven to consider the arts only as a passing distraction from stressful lives – like Sally's amusing book, of value only if it makes money? Godber jumps feet first into this furious domestic row which gathers believability and strength – Sally's book becoming a totem by which to judge the value of art itself, should it make you laugh or cry, and which is best? – And what does it all mean to these two ordinary people, hung up on missed opportunity, a stalled marriage and life? – So as Sally roars her anger, and Jack gradually regains his dignity, we all empathize and are surprisingly touched by their eventual reconciliation.

Of course the beauty of this populist, profound and clever kitchen sink drama (Kitchen beautifully created by Pip Leckenby) is that it makes the audience, and Jack and Sally, both laugh and cry – and Godber's case for the value of the arts resonates in all our lives. A thought provoking, hilarious and always engaging entertainment from a master playwright – very far from 'losing the plot'.

Submitted by [Ade Morris](#)