

Theatre REVIEW – Crude *****



Crude, by Grid Iron (photo credit: Eoin Carey)

There's a moment during Grid Iron's production of *Crude* when the multi-award-winning Edinburgh-based theatre company takes full advantage of the cavernous, industrial performance space offered by Shed 36 in the Port of Dundee. As literal dollars rain down from a derrick on an oil man, an Oil Mermaid in slick black plastic performs aerial acrobatics, glitchy music plays, and the big screens explode with scenes of oil exploration.

Then the scene returns to a bar in Dyce, the Niger Delta, a prison cell in Murmansk, a survivor of the Piper Alpha disaster. It's some time in the present, the recent past, or the near future. It's as if traditional three-act storytelling has collapsed under the weight of the hundreds of thousands of barrels of oil that have been produced since the play began an hour ago.

Grid Iron's subject is huge, and the scale of *Crude's* ambition reflects that. When ten-gallon-hatted, one-man chorus that is Texas Jim Crude downloads the history of oil production, the play creaks like a rig under pressure. But Ben Harrison's script is at its most engaging when it keeps the humanity of the off-shore rigger and his daughter, the protestor, the activist, and the executive front and centre.

The sentiments these characters speak are real, reflecting Harrison's extensive interviews with people working in the industry. He writes of their lack of hypocrisy. 'The end user is where the environmental issue lies,' one of them relates, 'not with the oil industry itself.' It turns out Texas Jim's info dump is necessary, if the audience is to be confronted with its own complicity. On a day we are told we should

celebrate the housing market taking homes even further out of young people's reach, are we meant to mourn for a passing of 'peak oil' that's been predicted almost since the first discovery in Titusville in 1859?

Yet, when the play draws to a close, that audience doesn't stop clapping a charismatic cast among whom Phil McKee and Kirsty Stuart particularly excel. Harrison's direction, Becky Minto's set & costume design, and the music, sound, and video design of Pippa Murphy and Lewis den Hertog provide a setting that lets them all shine.

And as the buses drive us back to the city centre past rigs floating like space stations somewhere between an inky sky and crude-black water, there's a murmur among the riders that suggests we've seen theatre that is not just accomplished, but *important*.

*Crude ends its run at Shed 36 in Port of Dundee on 23 October
| Buses leave from the Greenmarket car park at 19:40 | £21/£19
(Concs)*