

Theatre review: Charlie Sonata – The Lyceum ****

☒ Charlie aka 'Chick' (Sandy Grierson) is a dive-bar wreck reject from London sloshed back upon the shores of his native Scotland.

Time has changed all.

He and his two old Uni pals are now in their forties. They both have jobs, real jobs. Chick has a real job too – getting out of bed before midday – if he has one.

Jackson (Robert Jack) argues that time-travel is non negotiable and flings them back to early 90s Stirling Uni where he expounds the essential tenets of Britpop. 'The teenagers today don't know they are born.' Time warps indeed.

Time has yet to truly warp Gary's (Kevin Lennon) future as the play opens with his teenage daughter, Audrey, hospitalised in a post-accident deep coma. Her hair tresses splayed across her bed pillow like a drowned Ophelia. Is her plight a catalyst for Chick to do something right for once? Atonement for his wastrel ways? Might he just need a pint to think it over first?

The enigmatic, tragic motor-mouth Meredith (Meg Fraser) can help him there. Part contemporary parable, part inner-ring-road trip Pilgrim's Progress within the corrupted bowels of naked cities where the streets have no shame, maybe Chick is biting off more than he can spew? Nothing may become of his life like the leaving of it.

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Photo – Drew Farrell

Fractured narrative constructs, surrealistic episodic delirium

tremens manifest Chick's past and present demons. We can sympathise, at a distance, with his clownish dilemma, empathy is a much bigger ask.

Director, Matthew Lenton, keeps the pace taught on an uneasy elastic leash near close to snapping. Playwright, Douglas Maxwell's, bristlingly lyrical chainsaw chattering dialogues ferment conflict and pathos, gallows humour and gravitas with rats in a burning sack urgency. Teasing developmental plot threads tend to unravel with as much reassurance as a barbed-wire brain massage.

Robbie Gordon's Everyman Narrator presence provides a detached, observational commentary complimented by a covertly ambiguous moral compass. An iconic red telephone box on rollers features as a set piece, is it a Time themed TARDIS teaser?

A messianic 'Chick, phone home' motif? The well signalled sacrificial atonement denouement tableaux propositioning Charlie as an alt.Prince Charming overcoming the forest of thorns to rescue Sleeping Beauty, Audrey, eschews any laboured Christian symbolism. It hardly needs to.

Daring and cocky, laced with robust vernacular, Lyceum Artististic Director, David Greig, allows this company's corps d'derringdo enough rope to hang himself with. Charlie Sonata – a clown of thorns discovering his inner sleeping beauty.

As close to a elegiac modern Greek tragedy as a drunken Saturday night kebab dropped in the bus shelter its resonance and poetic grit remain ferally enchanting. It is just what The Lyceum just does and does well these days or be damned for it – whatever.

[The Royal Lyceum Theatre](#) **Edinburgh, 30b Grindlay Street, Edinburgh, EH3 9AX**

