

Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2017 – How to Act ***

Internationally renowned theatre director Anthony Nicholl has travelled the globe on a life-long quest to discover the true essence of theatre. Today, he gives a masterclass, demonstrating first-hand the methods he cultivated in Africa and throughout the world.

Promise, an aspiring actress, has been hand-picked to participate. What unfolds between them forces Nicholl to question all of his assumptions about his life and art. How to Act explores the contemporary realities of personal, cultural and economic exploitation through two individuals drawn together in the theatre. Both believe in truth, but each has their own version of it.

The [National Theatre of Scotland](#) has produced many great plays since it was formed in 2006. Sadly, [How to Act](#) doesn't rank with the best, such as Black Watch or the James Plays, which is unfortunate as I was really looking forward to it.

✘ I'm not saying this is a bad play, it's just not as good as some will no doubt have you believe. How to Act is as good as [the Alien Chicken Remembers Galatea](#), say, and both have as many faults as the other. However, the former has the money and backing behind it so will be talked of louder and for longer. That's not fair but, sadly, such is life.

Both have something worth hearing, but only one has the chance of a UK tour and a possible West End run.

The fault does not lie with the actors though, as both Robert Goodale and Jade Ogugua are very good in their roles. Ogugua as Promise impressed me in particular, able to show strength and vulnerability, anger and maturity; I look forward to seeing her more in the future.

Goodale plays an ageing, self-important actor very well but doesn't control your attention as much. Sadly though, both are let down by the script, which covers old ground and lack subtlety.

There was little in the finale that I hadn't seen coming from near the beginning and while various valid points were made about the West's actions in Africa, there was nothing new here. While I was intrigued by Promise's life and wanted to explore more of it, Anthony Nicholl's is less compelling.

In fact, it felt that the writer thought that too, which is why we didn't hear more about Promise's childhood. This was a Fringe show where for once I would have liked it to be longer, if only to discover more details behind Promise's chosen memory.

This is a good play, it just isn't great and nowhere near as challenging or clever as it thinks it is or wants to be. Judging from the reviews on the Fringe's website, I'm in a minority. That didn't stop me from leaving the theatre disappointed after this show though; overall I thought it lacked subtlety.