

Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2017 – REVIEW – A Tale Etched in Blood and Hard Black Pencil*****

When a double murder reunites the classmates of St Elizabeth's Primary School, scores are settled, debts repaid and alliances forged.

Twenty years have passed but will those bonds still hold fast? This hilarious Scottish black comedy, adapted from Christopher Brookmyre's novel, takes a nostalgic look at school days, filled with psycho teachers, class jokers and playground feuds. All set to a cracking 70s/80s soundtrack! Warning – this play contains very strong language and scenes of a sexual nature.

I feel sorry for most of you reading this review, as you probably don't have a chance of seeing this wonderful [play](#). That's because [Horsehead Theatre](#)'s all-too brief run has already sold out.

Good news for them, well deserved too; bad news for punters who'll miss seeing it.

While some sections and characters from Christopher Brookmyre's book are missing, all the main players and beats are there. I was really impressed by how the cast deal with the adaptation and the regularly shifting scenes. For those who don't know the story, it covers murder, revisiting your childhood memories and friends, plus learning folk aren't who they once were.

The cast cover the material very well, whether it's the events that draw old school friends back together or as we see them

rise through the school system from the first day of Primary One. Noodsy and Turbo (whose nickname is oddly missing in the adaptation) are spot on and JoJo drips acid. Martin starts carrying less angst than in the book but not at the expense of characterisation or plot. I also found it reassuring to see a normal shaped male actor play a late thirty-something, not some wee rake. A notable mention too for the actor playing Noodsy – that laddie sure knows how to look good on the dance floor.

This is a piece of glorious physical theatre, which I know sounds pseud-y but isn't meant that way. Even while rearranging the props the cast do so in a measured way, at times in keeping with their character. There are beautifully choreographed dance scenes, especially those set at the school discos. In fact, they are horrifyingly accurate portrayals of what happened, at least from my experience. The choice of music is wonderful too – who doesn't like a bit of BA Robertson's Bang Bang after all. Honourable mentions also for the S1 changing room scenes, which feature great dancing and a great interpretation of D.I.S.C.O..

I really enjoyed this play and it is top of the class as far as I'm concerned. There's not a bad egg in sight. I also enjoyed hearing Scots voices and what I'm regularly told is old man slang on stage. Sadly, there are too few local voices on offer during the Fringe and I would imagine companies like Horsehead Theatre find it extremely hard to cover the various costs or performing in Edinburgh during August. Perhaps the Fringe, a registered charity, could set up a bursary of some sort for Scottish talent to help them appear here.

If you don't have a ticket to see A Tale Etched in Blood and Hard Black Pencil and can't get one through returns, then there's a performance as part of [Bloody Scotland](#) on the 9th of September. You'd be a pure tube to miss out on seeing this wonderful play. I'm looking forward to seeing what Horsehead Theatre bring to Edinburgh next year, hopefully for a longer

run.