

# Edinburgh International Festival 2018 REVIEW- The Beggar's Opera \*\*\*\*

John Gay's original 18th century performance of The Beggar's Opera is made wilder and more raucous to fit with 21st century changed sensibilities in this new stage production from Paris's Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord directed by Robert Carsen. Playing with the expectations of the audience, it seems always one step ahead as it pushes boundaries and undermines institutions with its wit.



Beggar's Opera Edinburgh International Festival 2018 Photo John Preece

The show does not escape the political consciousness that formed the basis of Gay's production. Instead, it tackles different heated crises of our time that have international

resonance and in a way that strikes at the comfort of its audience. Initially we are faced with the homelessness crisis; one that is difficult to escape from on the streets. This is a play that directly challenges blindness to social issues by making those who have power over the stage, operatic beggars and prostitutes from the East End of London.

Its hilarity and at times, completely ludicrous nature plays into a larger social commentary.



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However, the characterisation of women in the play is not renewed with the same vigour. Women are stripped of their agency, oversexualised and undermined. It is clear that this was a conscious decision to remain close to the original script; the female characters satisfy all the stereotypes proposed about women in the 18th century.

Yet, the play does pack a punch in other areas. As a play with a socialist core, it does not fail to comment on the

government of today. Sneaky jabs at the Brexit negotiations and at Theresa May's leadership remind the audience, from a largely international perspective, of our own modern political quandaries.



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Members of the justice system are portrayed as revelling in

their corruption. It would be a serious point if the chief of police and the central lawyer in the play were not so unashamedly honest about it. As was intended, this is a satire on all of society. Here the police have so little morality, there seems very little to separate them from those they jail. The police themselves are so entrenched in the criminal world. Their drug habits also leave a lot to be desired; haunting images of the police force snorting cocaine on a stroller are hard to forget.

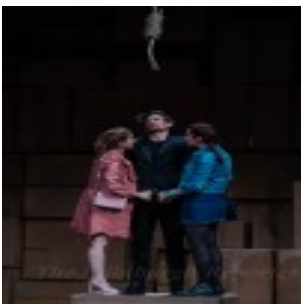
Certainly, this is an uproarious and energised play. One in which the audience are laughing along and the actors perform with a twinkle in their eyes.

In the apparent chaos, it is clear that the production harbours a brilliance which is untameable but definitely refreshing.

The Beggar's Opera runs till 19 August. [Tickets here.](#)



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