

Review: American Idiot ***

I have to admit that when I was invited to the opening night of American Idiot at the Edinburgh Playhouse on Tuesday evening I didn't know what to expect. I asked a couple of friends who merely shook their heads and petted their lips. Eventually someone told me the show was based on the music of American pop-punk band Green Day. Grateful for the info, I was still none the wiser. Yet, it was an enjoyable evening even though there wasn't a huge crowd at the Playhouse.

Green Day first came to prominence in the 1980s formed in 1986 by lead vocalist and guitarist Billie Joe Armstrong and bassist Mike Dirn. It's a level of my ignorance that I discovered Green Day

have sold more than 85 million records worldwide and have won five Grammy Awards. Their 2004 album *American Idiot* was labelled a punk rock opera and depicts modern American life in the aftermath of traumatic events such as the attacks on New York and Washington in September 2001 and the Gulf War. As the title suggests this is the basis of the theatre production.

The show starts with a bang and rarely lets up as you might expect from a punkish band. It's difficult to label a particular genre on *American Idiot* but a starting point might be *The Clash* meets *James Taylor* meets *Trainspotting* meets *Friends*. If that sounds fanciful then head to the Playhouse and see for yourself.

The first act is just 50 minutes and comes to something of an abrupt end. However, the start of act two has a very powerful scene where leading man Johnny – played by Tom Milner, perhaps best known for being in BBC Television's *Waterloo Road* – dabbles with strong drugs. It's a scene which is unusual for a musical – it's played in complete silence which adds to its powerful poignancy. It's reminiscent of the ground-breaking film *Trainspotting* – there's even a filthy toilet in the corner of the stage.

Some of the music certainly appealed to this ageing punk and this was mixed by more genteel numbers and the scene where Milner strums his guitar in a drug-infused stupor declaring his love for his girlfriend is very

moving.

It wouldn't be a musical without hope, however, and the emotionally charged number When September Ends towards the end of the show demonstrates the characters belief that there can be better days ahead.

Kudos to a brilliant production and a passionate and energetic cast as well as the superb band situated at the top of the stage.

American Idiot is on at the Edinburgh Playhouse until Saturday 9th February 2019. Tickets [here](#).

Edinburgh Reporter rating: ***