

Theatre review: Night Duty / Desk Job

During the property boom, Edinburgh became dangerously short of rough-edged, informal spaces where anything could happen. But times are changing; and here to prove it is a double-bill of shoestring theatre at the shabby but enticing GRV.

Before they go much further, though, Andy Corelli's group of actors need to do two things. First, they need to change their pretentious Arthurian name (Siege Perilous) and second, they need to work out what to do with material like the first of their two plays, Mark Russell's three-hander Night Duty.

Set in a mental hospital where the inmates are involved in therapeutic re-enactments of contemporary politics, the play is such a complex tangle of self-referring nods to the old modern movement in theatre that it wouldn't have seemed out of place in the first Traverse season, 46 years ago; and the cast never come close to the disciplined satirical tone that might make Russell's play look like more than an undergraduate sketch.

Paul Bishop's Desk Job, though, is a seriously interesting play, and sharply directed by Corelli with an excellent six-strong cast. The play is a dark take on heartless bullying: over a couple of days, a foul, manipulative and abusive boss, John, reduces a submissive employee, Ray, to a helpless wreck.

The play's trick, though, is to have every actor play each of the characters in successive scenes, in a thrilling demonstration of how the role of boss, in a rotten system, brings out the bully in everyone. It's familiar material, but it's brilliantly done, and is a fitting requiem to the age of mindless testosterone-driven management that now stands at the bar of public opinion, trying to find a voice in which to apologise.

By **JOYCE MCMILLAN**

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