

'Self Help' / 'Respect' by Anita Gallo

Not only are Siege Perilous supporting new writing in Edinburgh, their use of the GRV has opened up a new theatre space: the cool, white room up the stairs from the bar is both intimate and neutral, the perfect space for the two works this evening. Both written by Anita Gallo, with small casts and imaginative staging, they demand energy and the GRV lends them the charm of close-up magic.

The first half- *Self Help*- is frenetic, with the cast of four leaping in and out of character, changing scenes and working humour from one woman's search for love. At first, it comes off as a satire on the absurd positivity of self-help manuals and dating agencies, but gradually develops a sub-plot about financial skulduggery and sharp business activities. The script does rely on gender clichés, and aims for broad humour rather than focussed wit. Nevertheless, the bustle of the cast lends the hour a good spirit, and where the plot is weak, all performers make the best of the light tone.

The second half- *Respect*- is a short two-hander that turns a one-night stand into a painful battle of wills. Paul Comrie- having played a fluffy homosexual in *Self-Help*- suddenly becomes murderous, a working-class avenger ready to punish the wealthy young woman for her assumptions about his availability. His partner for the night is played with ambiguity and verve by Justine Wortsman, and this quick-fire and tense work manages to cover class, sexuality and suspected matricide in a convincing and cutting dialogue.

Gallo's writing takes on both wild humour and dark emotions: *Self-Help* is knockabout comedy that plays with the limitations of the production for laughs, while *Respect* has the potential nastiness of a *Mark Ravenhill*. At times, she sacrifices characterisation for plot or dramatic impact- the endings of both plays feel forced, but she captures the lingering terror beneath the conversation in *Respect* while maintaining a rapid pace in *Self-Help*.

The divergence between the two works is huge, enough to suggest two separate authors and suggesting that she has a massive range of styles. Yet the audience responded positively to both and Andy Corelli's taut direction kept the action moving. Siege Perilous deserve respect for their casting, imagination and vision.

Gareth Vile; *The Skinny*