

'Turning to the Camera' by Simon Jackson ☆☆☆

Ocean Terminal, the vast multi-storey shopping centre on the waterfront in Leith, seems an up-to-the-minute place to stage a play; which is fitting, since *Turning To The Camera* is an up-to-the-minute play to stage. With its tale of a tabloid photographer caught in the midst of international intrigue, it has echoes of the Leveson Inquiry and the Arab Spring – and its often-irreverent topicality is both thoughtful and entertaining, despite a few shortcomings in the execution.

The comedy-thriller genre is difficult to pull off, but playwright Simon Jackson comes very close indeed. The script is edgy (think bearded terrorists) but not without sensitivity, and there's a reliable procession of dry one-liners – which packed unexpected punch, despite their comforting sense of wise-cracking familiarity. Most of all, Jackson rounds out the stereotyped image of the hard-drinking news-hound, revealing interesting contradictions as the hunter becomes the prey.

Sadly though, despite an intensely committed performance from leading man Ian Sexon, I never felt much urgency around our paparazzo's plight. The humour, rather than breaking the tension, tends to overwhelm it – yet there's not enough pace to hold up as a full-on comedy caper. The production as it stands is a witty, clever amusement; but there's a sense of more potential yet to be explored.

A few production glitches also dampened the mood. The lighting was occasionally distracting, with actors wandering needlessly into the shadows, and spotlights fell on furniture rather than the characters seated there. The extensive background projections also suffered from lapses in continuity. These are little things, but they all chip away at the play's foundations.

Yet I've no such reservations about the acting, which was effortlessly engaging from beginning to end. A well-balanced cast fed ably off the ever-present Sexon – and peripheral characters, however brief their appearance, were fully and credibly drawn. A few plot points feel a little heavy-handed – at one point, there are even some PowerPoint slides – but the chutzpah ultimately pays off, and the inherent likeability shared by even the baddies helped keep me firmly on side.



Of course, you shouldn't believe everything you read in the papers. Is our journalist's narrative as reliable as it seems? This multi-layered play holds plenty of interest, and it's a solid first production for Siege Perilous' exciting new venue. Today's news may be tomorrow's chip paper, but I'll remember this story for some time to come

Richard Stamp; "Fringe Guru"