SUTCo Review

The Effect

Katharine Gimson (she/her)

Sheffield alumna Lucy Prebble's 2012 play, *The Effect*, in in safe hands with the Sheffield University Theatre Company (SUTCo). Funny, intimate, and intense, the performance had the packed theatre on the edge of their seats from the word 'action'. As the lights come down and the curtain comes up, any worries of a cringey, amateurish performance vanished.

During a double-blind drug trial of an antidepressant, the protagonists, Connie, played by Matilda Harradine, and Roberto Rowinski's Tristan, fall madly in love with each other, but is their budding romance real or simply a side effect of the medication? In an attempt to modernise the now over a decade old play, the show opens with a nod to the pandemic and the surge in cases of depression that accompanied it. Whilst bringing a new relevance to some parts of the story, there felt a forced relatability to a theme that carried on little throughout the rest of the play.

This is soon forgotten, however, when the audience is swept up in Connie and Tristan's tumultuous journey. Their playful romance sees Tristan unravelling the chronically-anxious Connie through an endearing dance performance to 'Single Ladies' by Beyonce. His boyish charm, wonder, and recklessness compliment a rational, yet curious Connie. Stripped back set and costume design mirrored the vulnerability of being completely out of control of one's own emotions, mind, and setting. The portrayal was sweet, yet one was left wondering if there was real chemistry between the leads, despite the actors' best efforts.

Arguably, the real passion was portrayed in the entanglement between the doctors leading the trial, Dr Lorna James (Abigail Wright) and Toby (Jamie Egan). As the ethics of the research are called into question, the furious altercations of conflicting opinion are heated and tense. Harsh, red lighting was cleverly peppered throughout the production enhancing the feeling of stress and confusion at crucial moments. Brilliantly delivered monologues moved audience members to tears, as the deeply personal stories behind the scientists were revealed.

Overall, the charm of the play comes from it offering no answers. Exploration into the science behind depression, love, and desire only leads to more questions. By attempting to unveil the truth or find an antidote to feeling, the curious are led down a path perhaps more destructive than constructive. The unsettling truth is that we have little control over the chemicals that make us all human.

Rating: ★★★★☆

SUTCo's The Effect played from March 12th until March 15th at the University of Sheffield Drama Studio



Credit: SUTCo





Credit: SUTCo

News

SUTCo announces Edinburgh Fringe Cast for Summer Show

Sophie Layton (she/her)

The Sheffield University Theatre Company (SUTCo) production *Peace Circle*, which will be sent to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival this August, have revealed their casting. The six-person team, made up predominantly of familiar SUTCo names, will take a SUTCo show to the world's largest Fringe festival for the first time since 2023's *We Are, In Fact, The Problem.*

Leading the cast are Alicia Fitzwilliams (*Shakespeare in the Park: As You Like It*, *Swap the Press*) as Becky, Ella Hulford (*Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, *Margaret Beaufort: Kingmaker*) as Wendy, and Matthew Heppell (*Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, *Shakespeare in the Park: As You Like It*) as Leon.

The trio form the distraught family of Jonah, the victim of an accident caused by Elliot, played by John Wood. Wood will be making his SUTCo debut in the role. Completing the company are Roberto Rowinski (*The Effect*, *Margaret Beaufort: Kingmaker*) as Elliot's reluctant brother Callum, and Emilia Lodge (*The Effect*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*) as Natalia, the facilitator of the process.

The play follows the five participants and their facilitator as they join the Peace Circle, a real-world form of restorative justice, aimed at reconciliation and understanding following a crime or tragedy. Written by SUTCo member Lucy Singer, she will be joined on the production team by Producer Jasmine Kaur Lee, Assistant Producer Jess Clayton and Production Manager Grace Lowe (*The Effect*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*). Besides Lowe, all members of the team will be making their production team debuts in *Peace Circle*, with Lee and Clayton seeing their SUTCo debuts with this show.

Sending a show to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival biannually, SUTCo's latest Fringe production is the latest original script to be platformed this year, following next week's *It Came From the Ice*, written by Luke Hookham.

With the latest SUTCo cast now revealed, and one of the final of 2024/25, preparations are now well underway for the theatre group to return to Edinburgh this summer. Only a technical team left to find, Singer's production has officially begun, with the countdown to Fringe already having begun.

SUTCo's Peace Circle will be playing at theSpace @ Venue 45 in Edinburgh from August 18th to 23rd

