



My Boy Danny

By Monica Yell | 11th Sep 2020 | ★★★★★

It's worth noting first off that *My Boy Danny* was never originally intended to appear as an MP3 available for streaming on YouTube, with that compromise being a happy result of lockdown. Happy for me anyway, since I get to enjoy it in my pyjamas.

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Opening the play is the first of several passages of broody, atmospheric music which make breaks in the script, removing you from the action for unspecified periods of time and adding emphasis to the lines which come before. The scenes between them toe the line between natural and expressionistic, with the intimacy of duologues in a domestic setting being offset by lingering speeches in the past-tense. Memory being a key theme, these expositional exchanges between the two leads are often nostalgic and pensive in the extreme, making each return to tension as the primary action resumes more effecting than it otherwise would be.

The three strong cast all capture the pace of their conversations well, playing off each other as adeptly as one might imagine they would on stage together. They also manage to maintain a vitally high energy level throughout the hour-long runtime. This is a commendable feat under the circumstances, especially in tandem with their abilities to support each other as an ensemble while shining lights on their individual characters in turn.

Kitty Whitley performs as Ange, a bereaved mother at breaking point as she chooses to invite into her home a stranger who has been intruding upon her grief. This inventive and captivating set-up asks Whitley to represent the audience's surrogate, learning simultaneously with the listener of the slowly unravelling events in question. She succeeds in doing so with a range which keeps the emotional journey she's taking you on engaging, but sometimes loses authenticity in the slightly more stilted moments of the script. I wonder if the need for overacting on account of this being a radio drama is the true culprit for the imperfections however, as subtlety is much easier to achieve when body language can be doing half of the communicating for you.

Opposite her plays Ben Kinsman in the role of a traumatised teenager. In the young man's wrestling with a need to be heard and do the right thing at the same time as protecting himself and his future, the playwright creates a humanised microcosm of the social struggles explored by the play, but later, again throwing nuance to the wind, this political message manifests in a literal call for change, the deliverance of which is one of many challenges ascribed to the actor. He also has to deliver a serious asthma attack, a reaction to drinking something far stronger than what he is used to or expecting, and a monologue which requires him to convey crying with his vocalisation alone, without compromising his audibility or enunciation. The fact he's able to do so smoothly is a testament to his skill and commitment to the part.

Supporting Whitley and Kingsman in a smaller, but no less memorable role is Atarah as Leah. The character balances menace and vulnerability in such a conflicting, interesting way that her contributions are impressive highpoints of the play's writing and directing, both accredited to Alfie James.

James' message is heartfelt and necessary, if a little obvious in a script which could do with trusting more in some of the genuine pearls of insight and sympathy it harbours. *My Boy Danny* offers a satisfying, enjoyable, emotive and intriguing theatre-fix provided by local creatives. In short, one which is well worth your attention.

"My Boy Danny" is the new play by award-winning West-End Writer, Actor and Director Alfie James. Every night Ange stands by the window looking out with the hope to see her son one last time looking up at her from across the road. Instead every night for the past eleven months there's been a

shadow standing there in his place. Desperate for answers, Ange lets the shadow in.

Rory is just a regular awkward teenage boy. Or at least he was until that night when it all went wrong. Desperate to tell his story and to reach out to a woman he'd never met but knew so much about.

This is a special audio performance of the play recorded raw over zoom during the Covid:19 Virus lockdown.

Performance can be found here:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=cl9J7NW2C8M