

A FIRST NIGHT REVIEW: RUNNING UNTIL SATURDAY 16 FEBRUARY

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***MEN OF THE WORLD* by John Godber
performed by Swan Theatre Company
The Place, Bradgate Road, Bedford on Tuesday 12 February 2008**

Fans of John Godber plays will know 'Bouncers', 'Teechers' and 'Shakers' well here we have 'Drivers' or rather we don't as Godber has broken with his tradition of one word titles for this genre of plays and called this one '*Men of the World*'. First performed by Godber's own Hull Truck Theatre Company in 2002 the title 'Men of the World' is a bit of misnomer really as these are 'men' of the road, 3 coach drivers, Stick, Frank and Larry, and their world extends as far as their coach trips to Europe. And a further misnomer is that they are not all men because Frank is really Frankie, a woman. Now you might think 'oh dear they obviously couldn't get enough men to play the parts' (a common occurrence in amateur dramatics these days unfortunately) but no, you'd be wrong. That is the way it is written. So here we have the now familiar Godber set up where the 3 main characters take on the personas of their customers, in this case a group of pensioners (the crinklies) who are on a coach trip up the Rhine Valley to Heidelberg, Germany to see a production of 'The Student Prince'.

As always this is a 'tour de force' for the 3 members of the cast who are not only on stage for virtually the whole time but who have to take on the roles and the various accents and mannerisms of their passengers of both sexes. The drivers have taken to giving some of their more colourful groups of passengers nicknames such as 3 ladies who they call 'The Beverley Sisters' because they are always singing, a group of men they call the Marks brothers, and various others like Mack and Mabel. Through their improvisations we learn a little about these characters life stories and about the drivers themselves. There is also the sub-plot that this is to be Larry's last trip and after working with Frankie for 6 years he finally plucks up courage to tell her that he fancies her.

This was a very enjoyable and faultless first night performance from 3 of the finest amateur actors in the area. I urge you to rush out and see it. I still wonder why Godber didn't call it 'Drivers' though!

SENIAH KRAM