



ROSE BOWL ADJUDICATION

Name of Society: **THE KELVIN PLAYERS THEATRE COMPANY**

Name of Production: **'THE EFFECT'**

Venue: Kelvin Studios

Date: 10th October 2018

Adjudicator: Clare Toghill

'The Effect', is a play, written by the award-winning playwright, Lucy Prebble of, 'Enron' and 'Secret Diaries of a Call Girl' fame. The piece is set inside a drugs trial unit, at the fictitious, 'Rauschen Pharmaceuticals'. We very closely, (voyeuristically), witness two volunteers on a trial for an experimental antidepressant called, RLU37. These drugs are administered by Dr Lorna James; she watches and studies the pair closely. She is in turn, as she discovers later in the play, is being observed by another Doctor; Dr Toby Sealey. These two have a past romantic connection and the two young volunteers also have to deal with feelings of new 'love'; but this isn't a romantic piece - far from it.

Questions about our lives, our souls, our thoughts, and our relationships, all come to the fore. Where does our soul reside? Are we driven by our heart or our brain? What happens if we lose our memory? What makes our personality? What happens when the effect of love wears off? Questions also arise about the cost of creating and testing new drugs on fellow humans; financially, morally and physically. We look at attraction, fate, loyalty, sanity and dependency.

The initial run of this play saw, Billie Piper and Jonjo O'Neill as the young leads. It was directed by Rupert Goold, for The Cottesloe Theatre.

(From the Kelvin Player's Programme):

"The play was inspired by real life events when in 2006; a drug trial in North London went horribly wrong. Six male volunteers suffered horrific side effects including organ failure and lost fingers and toes. It exposed the risks of taking part in such trials." Mat Rees, (Director).

This was a crucial detail to have included in the programme and it speaks for itself.

PRESENTATION/ SETTING – DESIGN AND DÉCOR: Bronwyn Grover: SET CONSTRUCTION:

Jonny Wilkinson and Team: The entire action took place in a traverse-staged setting. It provided an absolute feeling of intimacy. It is interesting to think that the audience on both sides of the staging will have perhaps witnessed quite different shows; this is always a by-product of traverse staging – there are many little moments that will be missed by one half of the audience, yet witnessed by the other. The actors did very well and we weren't aware of any conscious 'turning' to include the other half of the audience at any point.

The white-washed space incorporated quite a narrow strip of flooring, which was painted grey and was bordered with a blue, thick line on one side and red on the other. Seating, such as two banquettes, were used to store the medical props and sheets and blankets. These were easily shifted around the acting space to create different locations within the clinic. Two stools were used in a similar way. This space was clinical and sparse and flanked on either side by the audience in two-tiers of seating. There were four small flights of steps providing access to the seats and there was a boundary of rope, which encircled the entire space and provided a safety rail, of sorts for the audience. At either end of the space there were two white-washed emergency exits and these were used as the entrances and exits for all four cast members throughout the production. Two projector screens were positioned, one each above the heads of the audience on either side. I have never seen the space at the Kelvin Player's Studio used in this way and the totally immersive concept, which occurred from the moment we stepped foot through the 'clinic' door, was fabulous. It was exciting to sit so close to the actors and to feel a part of the action in this way. Superb work.

LIGHTING: DESIGN: Neil Bonnet & Kath Farnaby. OPERATION: Kris Hallet: The projector screens on either side of the space were used to full-effect: the initial logo which was emblazoned across the front of these to start; '**Raushen – your health is our goal**'. The projector screens were effective at announcing important moments, such as, '**EXPERIMENT BEGINS**'. Heart rate visuals were very effectively displayed. The Stroop test was good. The lighting on the audience was quite high throughout this production and this offered more intimacy to the production and another layer of meaning; we could watch each other's reactions to the proceedings on stage. A green light was used to bathe the set in an uneasy glow at many moments throughout, and this was the starting state for the play. Some icy, cold-blue lighting was used at various points throughout and this certainly heightened the intensity. Scan results were displayed with lots of information for the Doctors to pore over. A strobe effect of alternating red and green lights occurred as the final drugs dosage was

been administered by Dr Lorna. Tristan started to have a seizure on the floor and the acting space was bathed in a darker, eerie, green light. Well done to this department.

SOUND AND EFFECTS: Peter Spence & Adam Church: There were many, many cues for this production! The voiceovers were all perfectly-timed and the volume of these was spot-on. The production commenced with the introductory welcome from Raushen, this was followed with the sound of footsteps and this intensified our anticipation. There were several sound effects to play; bells, footsteps, chimes, heartbeats. Unpleasant and discordant sounds added to the discomfort. The intensity of the discordant buzzing noises reached a peak just prior to the ‘Pause’ for the interval. The sound helped to immerse us into the world of Raushen and it jarred and irritated us just under the surface of our own consciousness. Some of the sound effects were so subtle that it was possible to have missed them, but the low rumbles certainly added to the heightening tension towards the climactic ending of the play. Excellent input from this department, well done.

COSTUME: Mary McCallum & Marta Yazbek: As the audience first entered, Connie and Tristan were already in-situ. I am not sure that Connie would have worn the red outfit she was initially wearing as she waited. This consisted of a red blouse and fitted, pencil skirt with black T-bar shoes which seemed incongruous with the character and her later outfit - consisting of skinny faded jeans and a checked oversized shirt - seemed more appropriate, (although she could have changed this outfit to show the passing of the days?) I think even if Connie was to wear a smart work-type of outfit, it wouldn’t be red or particularly garish – so I found this to be an interesting choice.

Tristan wore a baggy, denim jacket with patches of flags, (of the countries he had presumably visited), stitched on the back panel. This was supposed to represent the pride he had taken in his previous wanderlust and travels, but again, I found it hard to imagine this character wearing a jacket like this. It seemed a little over-stated, even for Tristan. He wore this over relaxed shorts. His full beard and man-bun were very in-keeping with how we might imagine Tristan to look.

Both Connie and Tristan wore dark grey track trousers and hoodies, over a white T-shirt and trainers. These were identical and very neat. The grey hoodies came off just before the interval /pause in the experiment; they were both in plain, white T-shirts following this.

Dr Lorna was always immaculate. To start, she wore a fitted, fawn-coloured jacket over a black pencil skirt, black boots and her long hair pinned up. She wore glasses and often carried a clipboard. Later she wore a fitted, red dress.

Dr Toby wore a smart, light grey suit, a checked shirt, a tie, tan shoes, glasses and a staff lanyard around his neck. Later, he wore a red, casual jacket over a sweater and chinos.

PROPS: Kate Buchan & Satadru Mukherjee: The props were essential and authentic, which was pleasing. Dr Lorna had to deal with the most of these props; her clipboard was like her

personal shield. She used real medical instruments to check the volunteer's eyes, to take their blood pressure and so forth. The little stainless steel kidney-shaped dishes held swabs and the like and little trays were used for the biscuits and juice. The fake blood was very bright.

STAGE MANAGEMENT: Lucy Payne & Fran Lewis: It was very pleasing how the four actors took total control of the acting space and between them arranged and re-arranged the furniture on set. There were many, many configurations for them to remember and this was all performed without a hitch. The numerous props were concealed in several locations and the entire show ran smoothly and professionally.

DIRECTION: Mat Rees: This is totally immersive theatre; from the moment we entered through the door, we knew that we were going to witness this journey of Tristan and Connie; they were already there, in the acting space; completely immersed in their own thoughts, on their phones. This was a pleasing way to start. Connie and Tristan were seated back to back in the waiting area of the clinic and their lack of interaction was effective; as was their very self-conscious self-containment. There was a definite, uncomfortable silence as we waited for the play to begin; the door we had entered through was closed by the House Manager and we were given a lovely, long pause before the action started. It was interesting to watch some of the audience members twitch! The voiceover welcoming us to Raushen then followed – this was another immersive detail and a creative use of some simple technology, which brought the audience even deeper into the action. The authoritative voice told us to turn off our phones, take no photos, and warned us that this production may leave a mark on us too; feelings of loneliness, excitement or anger might occur, but that we were to enjoy our visit to Raushen. This was a nice touch.

What was exciting about this production was the element of real-time. We were waiting for things to happen alongside the characters; the blood pressure gauging took a few moments – we waited. The drawing of, 'blood' was a little fiddly – we waited. There was a sense of reality with the uncomfortable silences, the fidgeting; the marking of time as the experiment continued. I have to say that the taking of 'blood' section was so realistic, that it made me feel squeamish! This was superbly handled. The use of space was exceptionally-well handled. The size of the acting space was deliberately small, in order to recreate the intimacy of the clinic environs. The set was simple; mainly the two full-length banettes, which were used as beds, couches, seats, storage and so on. By simply turning them to face a different direction, a new room or space was created. This is very much a play of words, thoughts and emotions, the set must freely allow this – and it did here. The traverse nature of the staging meant that the characters had to be consistently mindful of both sides of the audience; however this never became an obvious issue. A good deal of, 'choreography' has to be done with the moves and positioning during the rehearsal process if this is to appear natural, so well done. Decisions had been made here to make Tristan from the South

English coast and not from Ireland as the script indicates – this removed the need for Tristan to speak with an Irish accent throughout.

The entire play script had been broken down into very clearly defined units or sections. These sections made complete sense and blackouts often followed them, to provide a clear indication of a change of tone, or thread. The section where Connie and Tristan recognised and acted upon their newly-charged feelings of desire for one another was superbly handled. Their dialogue overlapped when describing their accelerated libidos to Dr Lorna, as a build-up to the next section. The tension whilst they texted each other, the admission of love and the realisation of this passion under the sheets was all sensitively shown, before we were treated to a tableaux-style, quick-fire round of snippets from their rapidly-blossoming relationship; the, “Where will we live?”, the “Ask me who is in charge” sentiment followed by the declaration of love. The rhythm underlying this whole section was bubbling beneath the dialogue and it was highly effective. The several flashbacks, memories we witnessed were very clearly defined as such and there was no confusion at all regarding the plot. The arguments between Connie and Tristan were superb; the dialogue came to life with all of its natural rhythm as they overlapped each other’s words and constantly interrupted one other. The meaning of each word was conveyed with this truthful acting and appreciation of each and every tiny word spoken by the characters. Connie sponge-bathed Tristan under the sheets – it would have better if she could have used water in a bowl to do this. Having Connie use her mobile phone at the same time as masturbating Tristan was comical and conveyed the practical nature of their now-relationship. She was quick and efficient with the wet wipes afterwards. The use of split-screen freeze-frames in the final scene was effective – Tristan and Connie were bathed in a pale, yellow light as they ‘froze’ still and Lorna and Toby ‘came to life’ opposite them. The casting for this production was spot-on.

THE CAST:

CONNIE HALL: Martha Holly: We first saw Connie as she was waiting for the Doctor to arrive. Seated on a banquette, she was poised, yet a little restless. Her mobile phone provided her with some distraction, yet she was not fully engaged with it. When she heard the footsteps of the doctor, she smoothed herself down in anticipation, and sat to attention. She clearly cared about giving off the right impression. When she was first quizzed by Dr Lorna, Connie tried to appear to ‘know’ the answers and she did this with pleasing facial expressions which let us know that she was guessing. Her comic timing was perfect – little moments of humour were brought to the fore, with Martha’s subtlety; before sneaking a feel of Tristan’s urine sample pot, she took a split second to look askance and this neatly-framed the moment for us. As her, ‘blood’ was taken, she reacted very naturally, as one might if they are squeamish. This is an actor very adept at truthfulness on stage. Martha acts with such ease, and with depth of emotion. Connie’s chats with Tristan near the start of the play, as they were getting to know more about each other were very life-like and

natural; there was nothing neither obvious, nor laboured here. Connie was sincere and a bit geeky in her desire to well in the Stroop test. Connie paced up and down when Dr Lorna described the, ‘Dry Cleaners’ example. She felt a need to prove to the Doctor that she was indeed a clever individual who was studying Psychology at university, and then she doubted herself, “What would a normal mind do?” After Dr Lorna’s lengthy Bungee Jump joke, Connie tried to make the Dr feel better after an awkward pause and a lack of natural laughter. Connie’s recollection of her supermarket shopping dream was played with distaste for her own lack of imagination. Connie relaxed into the scene with Tristan in the disused warehouse as they shared a cigarette. The dialogue ran very freely here, “Yes...no...” Connie found the ‘Movie Speed’ reference really amusing and we did too. Connie wasn’t overly-sentimental when she recounted her name being written in the wet sand by previous lovers – the contact between them here was utterly believable. As the drug dosage increased, Connie became more breathless and paced around more. She became more and more energised, intense and angry. Her chat with Dr Lorna saw her impatient, yet she maintained a wide-eyed childishness; a sort of comical fear of what Dr Lorna was saying to her, whilst she confided in her too. When Dr Lorna told her that Tristan was on the placebo drug, she tried so hard to get her head around it. Connie was sad for Tristan as the play neared its conclusion; he was hunched over and not in a good way. Connie was supremely patient with Tristan as he was healing in a hospital bed. She gently informed him that he had, ‘Transient Global Amnesia’ and fed him yoghurt. He complained of having continuous ball ache and she relieved him under the sheets; this was sensitively portrayed. Connie and Tristan left the hospital; not ecstatic, but okay. This was an extremely intelligently-formed characterisation and Martha gave us a Connie worth believing in and rooting for.

TRISTAN FREY: Joe Chadney: He was charming in a louche, immature way. He is a young lad, who thinks that he has seen a bit of the world and he attempts to convey a casual, nonchalance; this has cracks in it too though, and at times we can see the lost, young boy beneath all of his chat and laughter and so there was a sense of vulnerability about him, which was truly exacerbated by the end of the play. When he was first quizzed by the Doctor, he leant forward over his knees whilst seated on the banquette; he reported, “No”, to each question about allergies and illnesses; he did this with an air of self-congratulation before saying, “Done well there then. Full marks for me”. This was funny because he was so relatable – lots of us have done this to some extent. Joe won us over immediately and this was crucial; this way we were all concerned about his welfare and intrigued to follow him on this journey. He was charming and confident. He flirted with Dr Lorna in a cocky, but fun way, “You know, you’re an attractive woman, Dr James.” He flirted with Connie in a gentle, jokey way too, when he asked to see her freshly-achieved urine sample. She touched his, he replied, “OOOh, you’ll have to be my friend now.” When Dr Lorna took his blood pressure, he tried to contain his restless energy and he offered her a carefree, slightly-hooded-eyed-expression. As the experiment progressed he appeared more

unimpressed, but retained a little sheepishness still. His vocal flippancy was great, as we could tell that some of it was masking his own vulnerability, "Thanks but I can't. If I'm one biscuit up and you're one biscuit down that could throw out all of medical science." This got a good laugh from the audience. It suited him to joke with Connie this way at the start – he was trying to impress her. Later, he didn't worry about sneaking out for a cigarette. Tristan enjoyed the word, 'BREASTS' in the Stroop test; this was amusing. When they had broken out into the warehouse to have a cigarette, Tristan's energy became a little wilder, he became a little looser. He drove this scene with Connie and the smoking, pacing and flirting was a welcome relief for us all; we needed these characters to break-out from the intense experiment for a moment or two. We were with them. Tristan stood with his feet wider apart and he was visibly more relaxed. Joe spoke with a modern, less-enunciated drawl, with his lips closer together. "You're disappointed I believe in God because you like me! Thank you Lord". This was a fabulous line.

The script called for a tap dance, with noticeboard pins in his shoes. Here, Joe gave us a more contemporary routine, complete with jazz hands, before waltzing Connie around. They had fun together. Tristan's physicality enabled us to see how he was faring on this strange journey; he became more shaky and agitated with each increased drug dosage. His physical playing of this role was outstanding; he hopped on the spot, shook his hands out, paced up and down, and smoothed his hands through his hair. Verbally, he roared, he stuttered, he angrily whispered. His re-telling of the ink blot joke was brilliant. The reveal of his harlequin boxer shorts was comedic and well-timed! "I don't care. Be sick in mouth. I'll eat it up." This was a very funny line that he spoke in desperation to Connie. He broke Connie's phone. They fought. He pushed her to the floor. He was horrified at this. Later he appeared even more distraught; wringing his hands again but now with his shoulders hunched forwards. His seizure on the ground was most believable and alarming and his shaking whilst curled in the foetal position made us feel very sorry for him. He couldn't be arsed to do up his shoelace, and a flicker of the old Tristan darted across his face at this. Well done on a brilliant characterisation.

Dr LORNA JAMES: Elizabeth Madgwick: Dr Lorna is a complex character; so full of contradictions. Her intensity was evident from the start as she tried to attempt to conduct the experiment with a controlled perfection. As the play gathered momentum, she realised that she could not control the two, young volunteers and her façade weakened, and we saw glimpses of her past, which threatened to de-rail her. Her appearance was consistently immaculate, (until the end of the play). Dr Lorna used a storage area inside one of the banettes really well, there were several medical props that she needed from this location and she handled it all very deftly. She coped well with Tristan's playful nature at the start and threw back witty one-liners his way, with a twinkle in her eye; "I've seen it all before". She pursed her lips when she was concentrating on a medical activity with the volunteers. Her repeated counting backwards from 5 became more chilling as the experiment progressed. The taking of, 'blood' was expertly-handled. She carefully put on a white glove

and pressed gently onto the small tube attached to Tristan and then Connie's arms. The red liquid filled the tube and looked really effective. She swabbed both volunteers quickly. She showed a maternal softness when Connie faltered during the Stroop Test as she reassured her that it wasn't that kind of test. She had a gentle smile at times like these. Elizabeth possess a wonderful articulation when she speaks as if she is tasting the words she is speaking; this was evident during the 'Dry Cleaner's' analogy she reiterated to Connie. She paced this section of dialogue beautifully. Dr Lorna dropped tiny details of herself into the conversations with the volunteers, "My background's in psychotherapy". She probably shouldn't be sharing details about herself in this way and it showed us that she was a real and vulnerable person too; with a past. Her Bungee Jumping science joke was superbly delivered; Elizabeth moved her hands and fingers to delicately emphasise her words; her use of gesture was very distinctive.

Her line to Dr Toby after his first entrance, "I monitor everything", showed us that there was a deeper tension running between these two characters. As she became reacquainted with Dr Toby, she attempted to look interested in his new partner and his kids, but then she softened as they spoke of a mutual ex-colleague. She looked searchingly at his face before he self-consciously scuttled off stage. When Dr Lorna found Tristan and Connie in the Warehouse, she wasn't furious; more quietly outraged that she had lost control over them. When she told them to go and rest their brains she did so with that same, almost maternal concern, but mixed with an uncomfortable edginess, before blackout and then lighting herself a cigarette, whilst suppressed sobs of emotion rose up through her as a voiceover of her thoughts attempted to calm her down. Her deriding comment, "Oh that's very Exeter" regarding an experiment involving kettles and ducklings, was perfectly timed and delivered and there were several sniggers rippling across the auditorium. From this point on, Dr Lorna started to become physically more stressed. She started to compulsively wring her hands together.

At the start of the second , 'act', Dr Lorna was skittish yet horrified at Dr Toby's request to see the scar on her thigh. Her eyes conveyed the many emotions which were hiding just under the surface of this complex character. Her following conversation with Connie took on a more intimate feel, as she quizzed Connie about the removal of her medical box; Dr Lorna was very absorbing to watch. There was softness to her searching words as she showed some patience towards Connie's situation. A key moment from this superb performance was when she confided in Connie. They sat with their knees almost touching and Dr Lorna spoke candidly and intimately about her past. She became more childlike, vulnerable. She challenged Dr Toby fully, with a questioning bite to her words, why was he testing her, she implored, as she also hinted that he may be responsible for the start of her own depressive episodes. Her eyes seemed to bore into the side of his face as she inclined towards him and quizzed his past intentions. This was very well done. For the final drugs dosage, Dr Lorna was far less composed; she seemed much frailer. Weak and a little wobbly on her feet – it was clear that all was not well. Her eye levels had dropped towards the

floor. After Tristan's seizure, she very openly showed signs of madness herself. She cautiously trod, barefoot now, across the space with the same brain in a bucket. Her hair was dishevelled and she was jacket-less for the first time. She wore no gloves to pick up the brain, in fact, she cradled it in her cupped hands, "All we are is this 3lb lump of jelly". She was desperate, hunched as she spoke her words about decaying bodies and minds, whilst grimacing and laughing maniacally. We saw a figure under the sheets of a second bed, then we saw a glimpse of her face peeking out from under the sheet – it felt wrong; everything was wrong for her. She was in the foetal position, imploring that she didn't have enough skin. She wriggled to the edge of her bed, sobbing quietly. The play ended with Lorna downing the pills that Toby left for her - Her mouth in a grimace; her hair over her face in thick strands; ugly sobbing. She counted them down silently, as if in a stuck groove of habitual behaviour. She sobbed heavily into her hands – broken. END EXPERIMENT. Thank you for such an engaging and outstanding performance.

Dr. Toby Sealey: Alex Knibb: He entered the space with an air of authority and lightly quizzed Dr Lorna on the details of Phase 1 of the experiment. He didn't hesitate to pick Dr Lorna up on the height measurements she was unnecessarily taking of the volunteers at this stage; we could clearly read who was in charge here. There was an awkward tension between them. His speech at an 'industry event' was superbly delivered. He had the air of a politician as he walked slowly around the space with purpose and poise. As he addressed us very directly, it was very easy to follow his every word; we were hanging on his every word actually. He used the props with ease; putting on rubber gloves and taking out a human brain from the metal bucket he'd brought with him. He emphasised the words, "There are diseases of the brain". As he spoke, he pinched his pen between his fingers and thumb and he rounded it all up with thanks to his afore-mentioned Dad, whilst glaring at the brain in his hands. His interest in the scan results of his patients was tangible. Later, minus his jacket, his conversations with Lorna intensified. He kept his cool whilst explaining to her that Tristan wasn't on placebo and that they were indeed also testing Dr Lorna as the practitioner. He then stood, arms folded, solid, un-swayed and self-assured. Their eye-contact was powerful. This character is blessed with some punchy lines of dialogue and not a single syllable went to waste here; "This is why I get annoyed, Lorna. You cling to the mystery. You celebrate it almost...You don't want to be curable, you want to make it grand and tragic, it doesn't have to be. "He is unshakable in his belief of anti-depressant pharmaceuticals. He raised his voice with a steady power to tell Dr Lorna that her lack of wanting help was infuriating. He quickly regained his normal volume and told Lorna that she was a good doctor. Alex performed this role with a good deal of sympathy and sensitivity; yet he remained calm and composed throughout. He performed using very expressive hands, which appeared to both delicate and strong. His tentative, "Hey you", to Lorna as she lay writhing in bed, seemed to be very typical of his behaviour. Ever the practical guy, "I'll do my best to be back tomorrow". This was a very pleasing performance.

EFFORT, ORIGINALITY AND ATTAINMENT:

There are certainly moments of imperfection in the writing of Prebble's play and some of it feels exaggerated, but I think we need to look at this piece as a whole; stand back and consider the questions it passively-aggressively throws at us. If the aim of theatre is to make us stop and think and re-think, question, research and discuss with our friends, then 'The Effect' is doing the trick. The Kelvin Players know very well how to tackle plays which test us and they certainly didn't disappoint here. It is wonderful that some theatre companies will take on work like this, to push the boundaries and give their players the chance to experiment with diverse and challenging characters. Well done to the Kelvin Players and thank you for a most interesting evening.

Thank you for your most kind hospitality and I wish you every success with your next production, **CLARE TOGHILL**