

A Recipe for Sloe Gin – World of Boats, Cardiff. 14-18 August 2018.

It takes a certain degree of nerve to stage a language-heavy, two-handed play in front of a plate-glass window through which the audience sees a panoramic view of Cardiff Bay at twilight on a summer evening. If Allan Neve's pair of interwoven monologues, produced by Clock Tower Theatre Company at Bay attraction World of Boats, was occasionally upstaged by the sight of a passing speedboat or ascending seagull, that's only because it's hard to think of anything that wouldn't be. Whatever else the show achieves, it should at least start a small feeding frenzy, as Cardiff-based writers and companies descend on this evocative new space, ideal for any show with a maritime theme.

Despite the impressive ambition of staging a play in this non-theatre space, here decorated with nautical trappings and half-filled bottles, it's misleading to call the production site-specific. While the Bay provides a literal backdrop to this story of an estranged father and daughter, the metaphorical, and much more important, backdrop is that of present-day Cornwall, where the process of gentrification, and the replacement of industry (fishing in Cornwall, docking here) with tourism has operated in a different way.. Like Henry Darke's *Booby's Bay* (seen at the Wardrobe Theatre, Bristol, this March) the play is set among a community in economic crisis, where the decline in the fishing trade, and the accompanying reliance on service industry and the sale of family properties as second homes, is echoed in the emotional disconnect between parent and child.

Like the characters, the stories follow parallel paths, only coming together at the very end. The father, a fisherman, loses his career and his wife to the sea, slowly taking retreat in the manufacture, and excessive drinking, of the titular sloe gin. A generation later, his daughter, who'd vowed never to return, turns down a job in London, and returns to look after him, getting a job at the hotel that has been made of the family cottage. Emotions are concealed and unexpressed – she never tells her father about the job, and has an ambiguous affair with a charismatic customer who turns out to be married. Feelings finally come out after the father's death in the daughter's honest, painful eulogy, which itself turns out to be a fantasy.

It's a slow-burning story, and one that depends very heavily on its performances, here in the safe hands of local theatre and television veteran Keiron Self and recent RWCMD graduate Georgia Theodoulou. Shifts and transitions are sensitively handled by director Matthew Holmquist, with only a few moments of awkwardness caused by poor sightlines, and an excessive use of emotionally blackmailing underscore. A gently enjoyable hour-and-a-bit, that leaves you looking forward to more from the ambitious company (whose next production, *Shed Man* by Kevin Jones, will play at the Sherman Theatre in November), writer, and (especially) venue.

David Cottis