

# "bouncers" by john godber essay



I am going to be writing a review for the theatre performance I saw called "Bouncers"; I saw it at Wildern School in Hedge End on the 5th of December 2002.

This production was written by John Godber, he also wrote the productions of Shakers, "teechurs" and "up and under". John Godber writes about normal everyday people. He mainly writes about the working class people who struggle and have unfulfilled lives and he looks at the humour and misery of their everyday lives. He finds comedy in the situation, even if slightly depressing, however he doesn't laugh at the people in these situations.

The setting for the production is around a nightclub in a busy low/middle class area. The scene is not appealing at all and each character in the play is 'bad', 'mad' or 'sad'. None of the characters are particularly likeable they all have their flaws. The 4 performers were acting out 12 principal roles. The difficulty for them was making distinct differences for the audience to realise what character they were playing.

There was no change of costume throughout the production but the characters were still easily distinguishable. The way that the audience knew that the characters had changed was by the actor's versatile acting skills. They used their physical stance, body language, their mannerisms and their voices to get across to the audience which characters they were. The bouncer's stance was stiff and upright and arms folded. They were all stood apart in a straight line and were staring out at the audience, which was quite intimidating. At the beginning of the show the actors collected tickets while

the audience was entering the auditorium, just like bouncers would have done, this really set the atmosphere in the auditorium for the performance.

Also in the interval some of the audience came into the auditorium slightly late and the bouncers ran out down the hall yelling at people at the vending machine and generally haggling them like bouncers would, " you were at the bloody vender, what sort of lame excuse is that sit your asses down". This seemingly ruff language really set the atmosphere and mood in the hall for the play. The ' blokes' who were out having a night out to ' pull and drink' seemed relaxed and fluent but as bouncers their movement was very static controlled and confident, unlike the sudden and erratic movements of the ' blokes' who seemed to be all over the place. In the pub for example no movements seemed to be controlled or planned. The lads were also always huddled together and seemed to be frightened too move to far away. If one went to the toilet they all went.

They seemed to be all slightly differing clones of each other. The actors all had handbags as props and symbols when they were female. They were used as a flag to tell the audience they were playing girls along with the actor's distinct language and movement. All characters were caricatures not exaggerated characters. The girls were extreme caricatures.

The girls were based on real personalities we would have all met some time in our lives; everyone has encountered a ' Plain Elaine' and a ' Sexy Susie'! There was one problem with men playing women caricatures. Some people may have seen the actors more as 4 unfeminine men rather than 4 men as women caricatures. I saw them as 4 men as women caricatures so they were

successful in convincing me. The actors did this by not pretending to be women instead they pretended to be female caricatures and this exaggeration made the character changeover very obvious to the audience I believe the actors succeeded in changing roles but some morphing was slightly 'flawed'.

However there were masses of very effective morphing moments. One moment was when the four lads in the taxi were going home wound down the window to urinate which blew back on them to their dismay, they react to this by standing up and kicking back the chairs they had been sitting on and saying, "look at this mess," suddenly becoming the bouncers again. From being a lad about to get into a fight and hit out, one character went forward and turns it into a wave and says, "take care mate" as a bouncer. Sexy Susie and plain Elaine are dancing with the lads and they begin to fight in slow motion to make it look effective. At the end of the fight the girls were attacking the boys and were on top of the lads hitting them.

Suddenly they changed to bouncers again whom were lifting off troublemakers. In this morph there was a time change from slow motion to real time. The props were minimal and compiled of 4 stools, some underwear, a bucket and 4 handbags. There was no special set needed; they described some of where they were so there was no need for major signals to the audience about the setting. The lighting also helped the audience know where the characters were and who they were for example outside the club there was a cold blue wash of lighting used, this was when the audience knew it was the bouncers outside. In the club the lighting was flashing and in the taxi it was an orangey glow.

I think it would have been more difficult to put across to the audience the location of the characters and whom the actors were playing at the time if suitable lighting wasn't available. Because in Shakespeare's time they didn't have sophisticated lighting like today Shakespeare used to have to make it clear to the audience where his productions were set otherwise the audience wouldn't have known. He used to do this by giving clues to the audience in his lines like; ' the birds were whistling', ' the sun rose' and ' the moon said goodnight'. But bouncers doesn't rely on dialogue, or refer to a location to make it clear to the audience except in the hairdressers. So lighting was a crucial element in the production. SET The music wasn't as important of an element as lighting but some parts would have been cut like the music on the dance floor and Elaine's bag swinging to the beat of the music.

There was a lot of music played and relied on. Without the music it wouldn't have been the same show, the slow motion effect would have seemed ridiculous. The play Godber wrote in 1980 isn't the play we saw because there has been a lot added to the production. They have updated a lot of references to keep it current and so an audience watching it would be able to easily relate to the production.

There are current issues in the production like Osama bin laden and Goths. The club didn't seem like it was any different to any normal club, the costumes were believable so were the characters, for all I know it could have been a club in Southampton on a Saturday night. Bouncers contained strong language and sexual references which might have been offensive to some. I believe the sexual references were contextual and necessary for the production to be realistic. The language was in line with the context of the

play, but some was gratuitous, there wasn't as much of a need for the language as the amount the play incorporated into the drama. The swearing kept the attention of the audience and gets a response from the audience even though it doesn't add anything to the story.

Lucky Eric's speeches were from the point of view of an older more mature man than that of Eric so I was quite surprised when such mature thoughts came out of Eric's mouth, It made him seem more intelligent than he appeared and acted and he appeared to have more depth. This older man inside Eric realized that not all sex was good sex and he was offended by girls blowing their childhood effectively to become tarts trying to look older in order to be taken advantage of. He talked about the time a group of footballers in a pub who took advantage of a drunken girl who didn't really know what she was doing. I believe that the theatre company Goodie Zombee intended the audience to understand lucky Eric's speeches and the significant meaning behind them. The way in which the theatre company put these messages across was very effective.

The theatre company seemed to use the humour of unfortunate situations to keep the audiences attention so that the important messages can get across effectively to the audience. Otherwise, if the whole production had been just lucky Eric's speeches then the audience's attention would have been lost then the messages would of gone unnoticed. The theatre company wanted the audience to feel sympathy for lucky Eric because as most of the characters he played the other characters picked him on, but the audience saw lucky Eric's speeches and inner emotions, which the other characters didn't, so there is some dramatic irony. The other characters didn't seem to

appreciate him as much as the audience ended up appreciating him for; he showed wisdom and maturity to the audience. The humour in the situations helped get the important messages across to the audience because the audience's attention was kept throughout and the humour made the speeches seem less long-winded.

I believe the theatre company was very successful because the messages they were trying to put across certainly were strong and stuck in my mind when the production was over.