

## The Host Re-visited – Buxton Festival

A man with sunglasses takes to the stage and settles behind a music console. He sits upright and, apart from his moving hands, is perfectly still. He controls the sound. Moments later Drew Bird, in jeans and a black t-shirt takes to the stage. He holds a script, other pages are scattered around the performance space, alongside a Pixar style lamp and a mass of coloured bulbs on wire. He acknowledges his audience, begins to speak, stops, pauses and repeats the same words. And we're off.

I notice I am anxious. I am 3 feet away from the performance space, a glass of wine in one hand and an awareness that there are only a few of us in the audience, in an intimate gallery setting where there is nowhere to hide. But there is something about Drew's performance style that allows me to relax. He gives words space, his actions are measured, there is thinking time and an assured use of the physical space. He adjusts the Pixar light. He strikes a pose....he creates a myriad of moments which stay in the memory...the awkward angling of his body in the glare of the light...like a model being asked to pose. Words collide and repeat and slow down. The story of the lift is moving, intriguing. When he sits with the microphone and repeats the words "It's the kind of darkness that resides at the bottom of the garden....." a chill goes down my spine. There is a truth he conveys, an authenticity that somehow transcends the gallery space, and the wicker chairs and the potential unfamiliarity with a non-linear content. Something important can happen with live performance. And Drew has an assured manner that enables us, if we dare, to go with him. He is honest and open and touches something that resonates with our own experience.

The sound component of the performance was, for me, at times jarring and I found myself being distracted by the presence of the musician, with his sunglasses and stillness. What was he doing there, apart from the mechanics of the 'music'? What was his function? Was he controlling the direction of the performance as the words were synthesized and repeated? At one point he stands, leaves the stage and creates a noise. I didn't really know what that was about and it felt awkward and distracting. Was there supposed to be a relationship, connection between them? It didn't materialise and took me out of the space that Drew had created. But, that, ultimately, did not affect the potency of the piece. Clever, thought provoking, moving, hugely enjoyable and life affirming. More please!

Cathy Brazier