

## Review: To Hold an Apple (New Writing Festival)

Rimika Solloway is pleasantly surprised by this semi-improvised offering

Rimika Solloway on Wednesday 2nd March 2011

With theatre just as much as with any other encounter first impressions count, and here I liked the set. I assumed it was going to be set in an artist's studio; there were crumpled shirts and fabrics strewn across the floor, stacks of old looking books and a few fruits lying on the table.

What I wasn't expecting however was that as much attention and care would have been paid to the detail of the characters in the play. A student production and a student writer yes, but an amateur production absolutely not.



The whole premise of the play revolves around improvisation and not a lot is spelled out for you, but despite it being a little cryptic at first it is a compellingly enticing watch. There are two characters, both of whom are actors, and they push each others' skills to the limit by improvising together.

An absurdly brilliant French accent and belligerent attitude is put on by Sonia (Alexandra Zelman-Doring) who improvises the part of the Impressionist artist Paul Cezanne to get her rather disjointed and unruly thoughts across to her actor-partner Alina.

Alina (Ella Waldman) in response takes on the role of the rather aloof and stark Modernist German poet Rainer Maria Rilke, who questions and pries Cezanne labouring at his easel; bizarre conversations are had, apples are eaten and boundaries are crossed.

The play is absurd but it in no way spirals into a dearth of slapstick and meaningless monologues. Thank god. There is a sophisticated flair to the whole script and its direction by Jamie MacDonagh; moments of delightful pure comedy seem to crop up almost naturally as the actors interact, whether as themselves or as their archetypes.

*To Hold An Apple* is one of a kind and I won't hesitate to admit that I would happily watch it again, and maybe even one more time – mainly because I don't quite get it. It is a pleasure to watch actors acting so beguilingly, and there is a sense that a hidden story runs counter to and underneath what is said between the florid-French-painter-Cezanne and the inquisitive-

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Rimika Solloway

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That may of course have just been the charm of the play rubbing off on me, but without a doubt Alexandra Zelman-Doring, who wrote and starred in the play, should be paid her dues sooner or later. There is a lot of talk about work or "*travail*" and the flaring up of tempers and the dying down of conversations, but on the whole the piece is rather benign and unimposing, like a good work of art. Lasting only 45 minutes and uncertain whether it will ever be staged again all those who enjoy theatre are advised to go and have a look.

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