



## Night Terror

at New Adelphi Theatre, Salford University

Reviewed by [Andrew Marsden](#) February 2018

Presented as part of the 'Practical Research Projects 2018' fortnight at the University of Salford, *Night Terror* by H & M Theatricals, ***Night Terror*** explores issues around Combat-Related Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in returning veterans from the war in Afghanistan (2001-present). Being part of a larger programme has placed obvious timing constraints on the piece and, as a result, the play feels like it is only just beginning to scratch the surface of the issues it wants to explore. This is not to diminish the important message of the play, or the quality of this staging of a piece which is clearly still in development, but instead highlights the amount of potential which is already instilled in the piece and deserves to be examined and teased out further in future productions.

The production makes good use of mixed media, with combat footage being played in the background whenever the three war veteran characters (Daniel, Chris, and Luke) related their experiences of combat. They watched their fellow service personnel, their friends, being blown up into tiny pieces - an arm, a foot, an ear - overlaid with a visual effect of what appeared to be a galaxy swirling, as though these images are emerging from the fog of their memory or have become so embedded in their thoughts that they have formed the core of their universe.

Perhaps the most effective use of this video footage comes at the very start of the play. An audio announcement that the play is about to start, is played several times as the audience enters the theatre, is interrupted with the sound of feedback, and the video screen at the back displays static and mixed up imagery, before playing a brief video of combat footage. The video is genuine but the sounds actually came from everyday sounds in the 'civilian' world - fireworks, popcorn cooking, and a door slamming shut. The video foregrounds a statement made later in the piece by Daniel, the protagonist, where everyday sounds trigger memories of the combat zone. This is something which will have surprised many in the audience - how the sound of something so routine as a door closing could trigger traumatic memories in former soldiers.

While the video footage helped to provide context on the experiences of returning soldiers, the decision to include a couple of movement pieces to signify Daniel blacking out from his PTSD didn't feel as well-integrated, although the use of light and sound in these sections was effectively deployed to disorientate the audience. Perhaps if there had been more of them, or they had been longer, then their effectiveness may have increased.

Another element which felt jarring in the context of **Night Terror** was the humour used in the opening scene. Whilst the punchline to the set-up was funny and was obviously there to lighten what would otherwise be a very heavy play, it did seem out of place within the wider scope of

the play. The play may have had a stronger start had it opened with Daniel's monologue about coming home and having no support to help him deal with his PTSD.

The four cast members each deliver strong, committed performances, no doubt helped by the dialogue which was drawn from genuine testimony from returning service personnel with PTSD. As Daniel, **Daniel McKee** gets to run a gamut of emotions: anger, despair, humour, and is convincing as a returning soldier. As his old service pal, Chris, **Ed**

**Barr-Smith**

brought a strong physical presence in his rigid, militaristic movement, although his Scouse accent was incredibly variable and sometimes veered into Welsh.

**Mark Flanagan**

brings a steely grittiness to his part as Luke, another former soldier, who finds himself "bracketed off" when trying to find new employment after his military discharge. The final cast member,

**Molly McGlynn**

, plays the leader of the support group, Lucy, who brings a youthful, 21st century sheen to the archetype of 'strong Northern matriarch' and is clearly a woman who, while being supportive, can give as good as she gets. Of the four characters, Lucy is the one who would benefit from an expanded backstory; is she a former soldier herself? Hopefully, further development of the piece would go some way to rounding her character out.

**Night Terror** has great potential which H & M Theatricals will tap into further as they, hopefully, continue to develop the piece. It genuinely provokes the thoughts of the audience as to how PTSD affected service personnel are often forgotten about once they return home ("I left home a hero and came back a hobo," as Daniel puts it), and a bigger production with a longer run time would add even more impact to an already powerful piece of theatre.