



Westernized by Nathan Smith

at 53 Two, Manchester

Reviewed by John Waterhouse, July 2018

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As Monty Python was fond of saying, "And now for something completely different"™. For a start, the venue is not actually the Viaduct-housed 53 Two theatre space but a marquee pitched on the tarmac outside. The stage set, of a bar, is actually a working public bar; opening half an hour below the show and both manned and frequented by the cast (complete with poker tables). Unfortunately, due to a spot of rustling by some low down, good-for-nothing, lazy, cheatin'™ varmints, the only whisky being served is Scotch and not Bourbon but the music is naturally country and so by the time the show proper commences, the audience has already been truly "Westernised"™.

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The story soon gets going with a Mexican stand-off reminiscent of an over-blown Quentin Tarantino set-piece scene and we are then taken on a non-stop gallop through the annals of

Wild-West folk-lore and Hollywood's best moments in depicting the West as we meet Injun outcast Painted Crow, Eli Jones (who can only talk in the third person), Shooter Sue, Sam the Prospector, Lil Jimmy, the bartender (naturally) and around another thirty or so characters from every walk of life in what is arguably the most consistently popular movie genre of all time.

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Westernised could be described as a loving homage to the romance and adventure of the West. It is also be said to be a totally off-the-wall satire, never for a moment taking itself seriously and delivering comedy, absurdity and silliness in ways of which The Goodies would be proud and Spike Milligan would heartily approve. By comparison, *Blazing Saddles* is a serious historical narrative and *Carry on Cowboy* a docu-drama.

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The comedy keeps coming over in the form of the purely visual gag, the throw-away pun, quick-fire character changes and songs. The original music is written in authentic Western style in the same way Neil Inness captured medieval-sounding ballads for *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* and the frequent interjections of steel-strung guitar add both depth and authenticity to this comedy roller-coaster. There are also interesting additions of physical theatre. The only scene which appeared to drag a little was one involving three mirrors but the pace is otherwise consistently fast, furious and funny.

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Westernised is the third satire/farce performed by Death by Pie, written by **Nathan Smith** and, for me at any rate, is the best and most rounded of the three, with no disrespect to either *Health under Fire* or *House on Hallowed Hill*. It is also an object lesson of just what can be achieved on a miniscule budget if you have the talent and versatility of a dedicated cast and creative writer.

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Death by Pie is now quite an established working ensemble who clearly spark well off each, delivering a seamless, sophisticated show. The mix is also well balance with **Nathan Smith**

acting as a lynchpin akin to a theatre version of Harry Enfield but make no mistake,

Death by Pie

is a true ensemble.

Dan Brazier

leads the comedy with staring eyes worthy of Marty Feldman and is ably assisted

James Beglin

who makes his own the kind of secondary roles which the likes of Peter Butterworth did so well in the Carry On films.

Scott Hodgson

is unquestionably the straight man and the straight-playing of most of his characters provides the perfect foil for the rest of the cast to Spark off; where would Eric have been without Ernie?

Both

Roisin McCusker

and

Hannah Hopley

demonstrated considerably versatility in playing male and female roles, both young and old and it must be said that Roisin in ways not dissimilar to Scott, brought forth a lot of comedy by "playing it straight" so heightening the absurdity of other characters.

Westernised is different and very much a fun night out and runs in the marque outside 53 Two until 28th July.