



[Wear Pearls and Smile](#)

King's Arms Theatre, Salford

Reviewed by [Matthew Dougall](#) January 2018

Silver Pine productions' latest offering is an evening of 5 one-act plays which tackle mental health, dysfunctional families, breast cancer, alcoholism, hospitals and being over 50 all with sensibility and humour, and with a deal of insight and truth in there too. The title being a quote from the third play.

For a Fringe production within the intimate setting of Salford's King's Arms pub, Silver Pine managed to amass a large company of actors and actresses to work with them - 18 to be precise, and some acted in more than one play even then.

The first play, '**27, Clayton Road**', was a beautifully observed courtroom comedy. Lawyer (**Emma Tugman**

) tries her best to keep her cool and bring about a murder confession from an emotionally disturbed and perhaps psychotic defendant Gail (**Rachel Howard**

). The build up of tensions and plot, interspersed with off-hand acerbic wit were excellently measured, but for me at least, the ending was extremely poor - it left the audience dangling as the court adjourned with no resolution, either comedic or tragic. Even the premise of the story had one thinking all the time as to whether such a thing could actually be possible and credible, or was our defendant a complete 'loony tunes'. The play was written and directed by **Beverley Green**

, and proved to be an excellent start to the evening.

'**Home is where you go to**' by **Anna Girolami** gave us an interesting premise. A domineering husband and henpecked demure wife are preparing to entertain the president of a horticultural society that he belongs to, and hopes that at their next AGM, next Wednesday, he will be voted in as chairman; hence the evening dinner sweetener. However, things don't go according to plan at all as the arrival of their daughter, who hasn't visited in 15 years, unintentionally puts a kibosh on the proceedings. There is humour in this tale, but mostly it is pure pathos. I use this word simply because this could easily be a modern-day Greek tragedy, and perhaps something that many families face.

Wendi Walker played Maggie, the mother who had to choose between her daughter and her husband, and in the end despite a mother's instinct, chose the easy path with sensitivity. Ted, the step-father from hell was given a stiff and unfeeling gait by **Colin Titley**, whilst their adult daughter coming back to the family nest to ask for succour and support, only to be given the brush, was played plaintively by **Angela Wityszyn**

. Showing off his comedy timing skills was a very empathetic and believable society President, Sam, played by **Andrew Husband**

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The final play before a short interval came once again from the pen of **Anna Girolami**, and was again like the first two directed by

Beverley Green

. 'Chuddy' takes us into bitter-sweet territory and as two mothers, as different as chalk and cheese, sit waiting for their daughters who are both being assessed and treated by the hospital staff, we learn much about these two women and the lives they lead. And despite their social, economic and cultural differences, they too learn that there is much in common, and although they know they would never be friends, they do become silent allies acknowledging each other through compassion. Heather (

Fiona Egan

) and Jax (

Ali Donohue

) managed, in their short time on stage, to build up an excellent rapport not just with each other, but with the audience too and had excellent chemistry between them. It seemed a pity and also somehow unnecessary that their duologue needed to be interrupted by the doctor, played here by

Lee Fletcher

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The first play after the interval, '**Control**', was written and directed, once again, by **Beverley Green**. This was the most diffused and competently written of the 5 in my opinion. It felt like I was watching an episode of Eastenders. I thought there were too many short scenes, all with cliff-hanger moments ending them. For my money it would have been a much more focused and intense play if it had been simply a two-hander, played in two separate pools of light either side of the stage with husband in one talking to the police during interview, whilst the other saw the wife with her bottle of wine chipping in her perspective every now and again. This would give the 'punchline' more gravitas, and really, the other scenes and actors were irrelevant to the story.

The two protagonists I mentioned, husband Karl (**Ciaran Griffiths**) and wife Lisa (**Lindsay Bennett**) gave astoundingly good performances. Griffiths' pent-up anger and threatening demeanour was balanced perfectly against the quiet and emotionally imbalanced Bennett drowning her sorrows. The ending was very strong, and not one that was expected. The other parts in this play were played by **Lee Fletcher**

,
Wendy Patterson

,
Greg Kelly

,
Tom Addison
and
Stephen Whitfield
.

And so to the final play of the evening, and yet again written and directed by **Beverley Green**, was '

Middlepause

'. Again this play didn't really need so many characters, in fact might have been stronger and more interesting if it had been a monologue. The style of this comedy - yes we needed a comedy on which to finish! - was rather tongue-in-cheek, but did have a real message to convey. We are at a meeting of the 'Fifty and Nifty' club; an alternative take on Alcoholics Anonymous, where people admit to trying to look and act younger than they really ought to be doing. 'Do up your top button; nobody likes mutton'.

The writing, the humour, and indeed the very performance of protagonist **Beverley Green** as

Marjorie was very reminiscent of, in fact could even have been written for, the late, great, Victoria Wood. Green commands the stage and the meeting with puritanical correctness, and her one-liner put downs were very funny. The comedy turn of Barry and Rona (

Stephen Whitfield

and

Fiona Egan

) was well observed and humorous, as well as

Andrew Husband

's leather clad, bare-chested, wig wearing singer / entertainer realising that perhaps he was just a little 'passed it' for such a look. However once again, the ending of this play was weak. Shame.

One thing I should also mention very quickly is the music. Each of the five plays started with a piece of music before fading into the dialogue. Each piece excellently and cleverly chosen, and I hope others were able to pick up on this too. Well worth the effort.

Verdict. A highly entertaining evening, showcasing some amazing talent, with five plays that will make you laugh, cry, and everything in between. Superb.