

Brief audience feedback/discussion recorded by Charlie Davison (volunteer)
immediately after:-

BY OUR SELVES

Colchester Arts Centre, 10th December 2014

Charlie:- *What did you think?*
Audience member (male 1):- *It's brilliant. It's the best thing I've seen that. Absolutely brilliant!*

Audience member (female 1):- *That was really good!*
Charlie:- *What was it that you... that you like about it?*
Audience member (male 1):- *Umm... it was very weird., very strange... But good music - yeah brilliant. But was he meant to fall of the stage?*

Charlie:- *Err... I think that he wasn't meant to fall off the stage. What do you think?*

Audience member (female 1):- *(Laughs)He was! And we were scared - so I jumped out of my skin!*
Charlie:- *But you liked it as well?*
Audience member (female 1):- *Yes, yes.*
Charlie:- *Was it what you expected?*
Audience members (female 1):- *No.*

Charlie:- *Have you ever seen anything like it?*

Audience member (female 1):- *(long pause)... No.*
Audience member (male 1):- *But I think it's the best thing you've had all year, so.. really good.*

Charlie:- *Great! (then to both audience members). Did it make you... I don't know... Has it changed the way you think about things or...has it made you think about something?*

Audience member (male 1):- *I don't know - I'm still digesting it...*

Charlie:- *Did you know the story already?*

Audience member (male 2) *No.. I had no idea what to expect when I came here. I sort of knew it'd be weird.. but it was weirder than I expected! So... nice one, cheers!*

Charlie:- *What did you think?*

Audience member (male 2):- *(hesitantly).. errrm, it was good.. it was very unusual... err it was hard to keep track..*

Charlie:- *Was it what you were expecting at all?*

Audience member (male 2) *I didn't know what was on tonight - until I got here - to be honest. No... but it was good - it was.*

Charlie *Yeah.. I mean.. this is a weird question.. but: What do you think it was about?*

Audience member (male 2) *Err... was it... was it a bloke who'd got ill? Like 'ill-in-the-head' and he's trying to find his way again? I'm not entirely sure. It was good though. Intriguing.*

Charlie *Did it sort of... Did it chime in with other things you were thinking about?*

Audience member (male 2) *It was sort of ... I dunno... It was kind of scary, sort of, it made you.. I don't know, it sort of like... I don't know..*

Charlie *I was going to ask you if you thought it was scary - cos I thought it was scary!*

Audience member (male 2) *Yeah.. makes you feel anxious sort of - you know what I mean?*

Charlie *Yeah... But in a good way? Or..?*

Audience member (male 2) *Yeah! Yeah... It was unusual...- but I did like it!*

Charlie *Great - thanks very much.*

Audience member (male 3) (he has been 'hovering' waiting to say a few words)

It was surprising...and therefore surprising things are always unexpected aren't they? I had no idea of what it was going to be - so I didn't know what to expect. (pause)... I found it.. difficult to get to grips with sometimes. And I'm still not quite sure what was going on... but I enjoyed some of the performances. My son is in the theatre and I wondered what he would make of it and

what part he would play. And I don't think he would have played any of those parts to be honest.

Charlie

What about.. what about the story? I mean was that a story you were familiar with?

Audience member
(male 3)

No it wasn't. I was totally unfamiliar with the story. I had a quick look on-line today before I came out cos I thought I'd get some idea of what we were going to see. Umm... I know Epping Forest - so I knew one end but not the other. I understood it was to be some kind of 'pilgrim's progress' - but I don't think it was. It sounded like the story of one man trying to find himself in a ... in "times gone by". But it could be today. But it was quite interesting to see the modern setting. They didn't try to hide the fact that it was filmed, presumably, a few months ago. Because he was walking by the side of the road and the wind turbine was going in the background.

Charlie

Yeah, yeah..

Audience member
(male 3)

So.. there was no pretence that it was taking place in the past.

Charlie

I mean given that .. (this is what I think).. that it was about Mental Illness, or what we would say nowadays was Mental Illness, I mean do you think that they had some kind of message in there about that? Something that I am almost meant to think afterwards?

Audience member
(male 3)

If they did it didn't reach me. I didn't see a message or hear a message. It was just an unusual... I suppose you'd call it an entertainment! It was an unusual entertainment - let's put it that way.

Charlie

Thanks!

Audience member
(female 2)

I enjoyed it - but I thought I had to concentrate on it quite a lot. You might have missed bits - there were lots of other noises going on round the side and on the stage. So I felt that I had to really concentrate. But I felts that the... err what's the word... that the descent into

madness...through his mental problems... I thought it was really good. I enjoyed it. Different.

Charlie

Given that it seemed to be a story about Mental Illness from a long time ago... I kept on thinking : "I wonder how things have changed?" I mean .. do you think I was meant to think that in any way? Or was that just me?

Audience member
(female 2)

Umm.. (pause) I think things have changed for the better, cos he wouldn't be in that situation there now. He'd be in hospital being looked after - medicated! (laugh) He wouldn't be allowed to go into public and.. carry on... now.

Charlie

No...I found it strangely emotional - but I'm not quite sure what emotions... what do you think?

Audience member
(female 2)

Yeah.. ummmm (pause).. I think he's a sad character really. The fact that his wife.. err his first love has died and things like that. And he's really forgotten it all - you know his mind was totally messed up really. ... So I thought it was really good.

Was it a story that you'd heard of before?

Audience member
(female 2)

No... no...

Charlie

So! What did you think?

Audience member
(female 3)

(she has been 'hovering' waiting to say a few words)

A very moving evocation of a sad life.

Charlie

Was it a story you'd heard of before?

Audience member
(female 3)

Yes. I've read his biography. And a lot of his poetry as well. But.. after he was in the asylum he still went on writing, didn't he?

Charlie

Yeah... I don't know...

Audience member
(female 3)

Yes.. And wrote good poetry from the asylum.

Charlie *I just remember there were a couple of John Clare poems we had to do way back at school... But.. emotionally.. how did you find it?*

Audience member (female 3) *Just very very touching. Very absorbing.*

Charlie *And as a piece of theatre?*

Audience member (female 3) *Oh yes... very original. Imaginative. I enjoyed it very much.*

Charlie *Thanks very much.*

Audience member (male 4) *Likewise! Thoroughly absorbing from beginning to end.*

Charlie *Are there any bits in it that made you think in a particular way?*

Audience member (male 4) *I particularly liked the middle.. I particularly liked the hallucinatory music sound effects. And the actual songs I was a big fan of. I kind of perked up when it was actual kind of folk music. I think it helped that the dialogue and the background sounds and the music all tied together perfectly. And obviously the films as well. It was splendid!*

Charlie *The folk music was their own particular kind wasn't it? What kind of folk music is that?*

Audience member (male 4) *I don't know! I was imagining it was something from ... that's been around from the time of John Clare.*

Charlie *For me, as much as anything else, it was a kind of play about Mental Illness. I mean...Did it strike you like that?*

Audience member (male 4) *Oh, very much so, yes. Yeah. It felt like intruding slightly into someone's ... someone's... sort of mental disintegration.*

Charlie *Do you think it's a sort of story for NOW? Because that was a long time ago...*

Audience member (male 4) *Yeah... I don't know... as we can look back... and we now know... that John... well he was a famous poet in his lifetime... But if it was just a person who was NOT a famous poet, mentally disintegrating and going.. leaving*

their asylum and wandering home to their imaginary... their imagined first love... I don't know if we'd look on it so ... so lightly... as such a, well ...not quite impressive... but of such interest if it was just an anonymous disturbed individual doing that!

Charlie *Yeah that's interesting. It's almost as if people in the creative world... they have a different...*

Audience member
(male 4) *Yeah - they're allowed to do that.*

Charlie *Yeah, yeah. That's an interesting point. And that must have been almost the same in Clare's day as it is in ours...*

Audience member
(male 4) *Yeah. I mean - he was accepted. And he had enough friends and patrons to look after him. There were probably other mentally disturbed people who died horrible deaths and didn't get further than the first ditch on their way home from the asylum! But he was, you know, helped on his way and looked after. And managed to live out the rest of his life not incarcerated and being looked after despite his mental debilitations.*

Charlie *That's an interesting point. So it's almost like a view of someone who's had quite a privileged experience - for his day!*

Audience member
(male 4) *Well - I suppose so! Yeah!*