The TAMARITANS THEATRE COMPANY
HANGMEN By Martin McDonagh

Performed at The Barbican Theatre, Plymouth
As seen by Nina Jarram, NODA SW District 3 Representative on Saturday 25th October 2025

Directed by Vince Sutton

The production opened with a strikingly immersive set: a dark, dingy closed pub, its red velvet bar stools evoking a bygone era of Northern hospitality. Yet instead of welcoming us with warmth, the sudden blaze of house lights revealed a disgruntled prisoner, moments away from his fate at the gallows. The actor portraying this hapless convict treated us to a comedic routine seeped in physicality and repeated protest of his innocence This jarring transition immediately set the tone, an uneasy blend of humour and menace. The sound design was particularly effective here. Clever sound scaping underscored the prisoner's ignored pleas, while the playful "noose-ography" quickly shifted into a chillingly realistic execution. This juxtaposition of comedy and brutality became the hallmark of the evening.

The pub soon filled with a plethora of stock characters, each brought to life with sharp comic timing and overlapping dialogue that felt both chaotic and authentic. These were enjoyable performances. The actor playing Agnes was the pivot of the scene whose patronage of this tavern outlined the sense of the small village community being portrayed. The actor playing the Inspector treated us to an enjoyable stereotype of a village bent copper seen in 1970s cop shows depicting a likeable officer of the law with a penchant for the odd pint and not a lot else. This was a strong and enjoyable depiction of a stereotypical Northern copper.

The actor playing Mooney ably portrayed the confident, slightly dodgy Londoner whose broken Zippo lighter became a subtle but telling character detail. His swagger contrasted beautifully with the pub's laid-back regulars. The actor playing the Landlord's 15-year-old daughter was less convincing in her teenage rebellion, largely due to casting age rather than performance skill. Still, her Harry Enfield–style "Kevin the Teenager" mannerisms captured adolescent angst with precision.

The actor playing Clegg the Journalist was assertive and hungry for a story, though the casting raised questions of historical accuracy. A female journalist investigating capital punishment in 1960s Northern England felt anachronistic, despite the actor's strong delivery.

There were two extremely experienced actors playing Harry the Hangman and his wife Alice; Landlords, parents and bringing together this wonderful community of misfits with an abundance of warm community spirit. This was nicely highlighted by the SFX of torrential rain from the outside and the realistic wetting of clothes as people entered the dry environment. The actor playing Harry is an excellent orator able to project effectively in any given space and acted as the pivot of the play able to successfully interpret the playwright's talent for combining dark and violent situations with moments of humour and humanity.

Mooney's final monologue was especially well staged: supported by the ensemble's strong and silent presence, it became a layered moment of tension and absurdity. The director's hand was evident in the ensemble's carefully choreographed physicality. Each actor reacted with nuance to the climactic accidental hanging of the supposed protagonist, never breaking character or intention. The farcical speed of the hanging scene left the audience breathless, unable to dissect the mechanics before being swept into its tragic absurdity.

The placement of the bar at the back of the stage raised questions. It forced some actors to deliver lines facing away from the audience, diluting the impact of otherwise strong performances. While the set was evocative, some costume choices felt inconsistent. Period authenticity occasionally slipped into hints of the 1970s and 1980s, which jarred against the intended 1960s setting. A special mention though to the actor playing Pierrepoint. His suit was exceptionally sharp with complimented his sharp performance, a costume that perfectly matched his crisp, commanding performance. His immaculate appearance even provoked a humorous curiosity: did his hair smell faintly of stale Byrlcreem?

While the soundscape was largely effective in anchoring the atmosphere of the piece, there were moments where the music became overpowering. Its volume and duration occasionally disrupted the pace of the narrative, pulling focus away from the actors' delivery and the subtleties of their performances. That said, the choice of music was period-appropriate, aligning well with the 1960s Northern setting and reinforcing the intended mood.

This production was a well-written, well-directed exploration of tragic absurdity, blending humour with violence to probe the moral complexities of human nature. Despite minor quibbles in casting and design, the ensemble's chemistry and the director's bold staging created a compelling theatrical experience.

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inevitable that his assessment will be affected by that knowledge.
The N.O.D.A. Representative's intention is to give an objective critique of the overall production and in particular the performance viewed. It should be remembered that any review of this nature can only be objective as far as the techniques used during the performance observed. Any criticisms expressed may not have been valid at other performances, and are only made to encourage higher standards in Amateur Theatre.
It is hoped that the audience's appreciation of your efforts will have given everyone a lift and encouraged you to greater achievements in the future and that the observations made by the reviewer will prove helpful in improving future productions.