

The Tamaritans Theatre Company
The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time
Performed at The Watermark Centre, Ivybridge

As seen by Nina Jarram, NODA SW District 3 Representative on Thursday 10th July 2025

Directed by Ami Philpott

When a play that you are about to see is based on your favourite book, you automatically worry about how the adaptation will translate from page to stage in the same way prior to watching the movie version of your favourite book. One thing you can rely on however is the quality of the performances from The Tamaritans so I knew that my text was in safe hands.

We were greeted with a stuffed toy dog with a homemade pitchfork sticking out of it and a hatstand displaying an array of different hats and costume pieces suggesting a more non naturalistic approach to the production. This excited me as a well paid-up member of Team Brecht whilst anticipating how a company renowned for the success of their naturalistic exploration of playscript would execute this challenging project.

The cast entered carrying identical boxes which they sat on and which later revealed to be receptacles hiding various props used throughout the play, This worked well and kept the pace flowing alongside the rapid changes of characterisation.

There was some impactful creativity from the Director such as the portrayal of the planets spinning around which was well imagined, the use of the projection mirroring the image of the character's drawing in live time and the symbolic way that the lead character was frantically trying to retrieve pieces of his train set as he struggled to piece together what he had discovered.

There was some confusion with the use of props versus mimed gestures and actions. Firstly, if you are going to demonstrate a door being opened through mime, then this needs to be an exaggerated gesture to suggest to the audience rather than to convince. At times the cast struggled with this which I think was due to the lack of understanding of the need for intention over action. Even in this type of production there is a need for consistency here to avoid audience confusion. Someone pretending to write in a book one moment should not really playing with an actual football or holding a physical cup in another scene.

There is no doubt that the Director of this piece is a very experienced theatre practitioner having read her programme bio, but alongside her vision and the challenging nature of staging this play, it seemed like a lot of the non-naturalistic theatrical conventions were not fully explained in the rehearsal process to support performer outcomes, which to me I'm afraid affected their interpretation.

The lead character was played by an actor who clearly understood his brief as one of the only cast members who played the same part throughout. This was a physically demanding role played convincingly and emotionally always engaging the audience. There was a lovely, juxtaposed performance by the actor playing his father taking everything in his stride alongside the chaotic mind set of his troubled son. The actor playing his mother also demonstrated a naturalistic interpretation of a woman who doubted her ability to look after her complicated son. The story was clearly narrated by an actor with excellent stage presence who represented the lead character's written word with a calm positivity amongst the busy execution of physical theatre, sound scaping, canonised sequences and character hopping.

The ensemble worked incredibly hard in keeping up with a challenging interpretation and I would like to give a particular mention to the actor playing the policeman and the uncle whose experience shone through. Alongside him, the actor portraying Mr Shears amongst other well thought out representations was also very professional and between them delivered slick and purposeful character transitions.

Mirroring the context of the storyline, there was a lot to process on stage amidst some confused lighting plots and overpowering music. What was evident though was a hard-working cast battling through a highly physicalised piece of theatre. A collaborative endeavour showcasing the excellent efforts of this long-standing reputable theatre company both on and off the stage. Well done on stepping out of your comfort zone and attempting something different, which is what Theatre is all about.

PLEASE NOTE: *Any observation made by the reviewer can only be based on what he sees at the performance in question. The reviewer may have received information in advance of the performance and it is 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.