



### ALL THAT IS WRONG

Strong words, softly spoken from provocative Belgian theatre company ●●●●●

There's power in simplicity this year, for the Belgian theatre company, *Ontroerend Goed*. Often tagged as 'provocative' or 'controversial' because of their knowing messing around with conventions, their show this year is a much more minimal, softly spoken affair.

Koba Ryckewaert is an 18-year-old strawberry blonde beanpole, and the co-writer and lead actress. Communicating through a giant blackboard on the floor, she writes chalk words to introduce herself. It's the volume-down, monochrome flipside to 2010's frenzied *Teenage Riot* (which she also performed in) – an MTV-blur of hand-held live camera and adrenal dialogue, and follow-up *All That is Wrong* still hits several nerves, just in a more subtle way.

A track from Canadian minimal electronic composer Tim Hecker provides the perfect gentle swell in the background, as Ryckewaert's tidy chalk confessions slowly sprawl into something more confused and longing. On hands and knees, she slides between scribbles about her 'awesome sister', to more probing mentions of her 'dependency' on her mum, or worries about the global economy and plastic surgery. Her performance is compellingly calm, with all the more impact because of its refusal to melt-down into a teen-melodrama stereotype.

Director Alexander Devriendt once said his goal was to 'show how your view of the world is mostly a projection of your inner world', made obvious here as the crowd's eyes are drawn to different parts of the chalkboard as it fills up. Restrained in every element of the production, Devriendt draws on the multi-media set-ups of before, only simpler – beaming Ryckewaert's 'OHP writing onto the Traverse Two's walls, or bleeding in news soundbites via an Apple Mac, but the messages are whispered, not shouted; held up (literally) before the crowd, rather than poked into their faces. (Claire Sawers)

■ *Traverse Theatre*, 228 1404, until 12 Aug, times vary, £17–£19 (£12–£14).



### THE BARWELL PROPHECY

Creepily effective late-night horror show ●●●●●

Pennsylvania's Slippery Rock Theatre delivers that rarest of things: a genuinely creepy late-night horror show. It's set in a shadowy Homeland Security monitoring office where eerie audio files mysteriously appear on a trio of agents' laptops, and there's an unaccountable feeling of cold in the former church's gloomy spaces. When two young 'agent groupies' arrive for an evening of drinking, things run out of control as a malevolent presence makes itself felt.

There are all kinds of unlikelihoods and inconsistencies in the story, but it's hard not to be swept along by the gradual ratcheting-up of tension. And the fact of the government's watchers themselves being watched can't help but raise a wry smile. The young cast are convincing: it's the (by the end) shattering intensity of their performances, that make the whole thing so insidiously effective. (David Kettle)

■ *theSpace @ Venue 45*, 0845 508 8387, until 11 Aug, 10.30pm, £8 (£6).



### A CLOCKWORK ORANGE

Stylish, shocking, all-male adaptation ●●●●●

Theatre company Action to the Word's high-energy, all-male adaptation of Anthony Burgess's classic novel relocates the fable to a futuristic northern England, full of rippling muscles, bronzed flesh and lashings of casual sex and violence.

Emphasising the homoerotic feelings that bind Alex and his band of droogs is a strong conceit – and one that's carried over into the scenes where Alex is imprisoned, where sex seems to simmer just beneath the surface. But it's also a perspective that drives director Alexandra Spencer-Jones' production away from Burgess' central themes of violence, power and control, which the show never really grapples with. It's stylish, shocking and seductive, but it shies away from the text's difficult ideas.

It's a fantastically physical production, though, rich with provocative movement. Martin McCreadie is an imposing presence in the lead, but he doesn't quite convey the volatile charisma that marks out the character. Damien Hasson is unsettling as Deltoid and the prison chaplain, and the cast fill out other roles with often animal passion. (David Kettle)

■ *Pleasance Courtyard*, 556 6550, until 26 Aug (not 13), 3.40pm, £13.50–£14.50 (£12–£13).



### THE BOAT FACTORY

Poignant evocation of a lost way of life ●●●●●

If you don't think a play about a shipyard sounds like your kind of thing, think again. This moving two-hander by Dan Gordon, performed by Belfast's Happenstance theatre company, is a real gem, at once an evocation of the city's Harland and Wolff boat builders in its heyday, and also a poignant paean to a way of work (and of life) long gone.

It's the vividness of the play's characters and stories that really marks it out. And it's an authenticity only confirmed by the fact that writer Gordon, who also takes the central role, plays his father as a wide-eyed apprentice slowly learning the shipyard's traditions and people. Michael Condon gives memorable performances as a remarkable array of striking characters who populate the place, and director Philip Crawford's staging is tight and taut.

But despite the mischievous humour, there's no misty-eyed nostalgia here – Gordon tackles the dangers and downsides of life in the shipyard head-on. It might seem at times a little long, but it's the telling details of the pair's tall tales that give the piece such a potent impact. (David Kettle)

■ *Hill Street Theatre*, 226 6522, until 26 Aug (not 14), 6.30pm, £11–£13 (£9–£11).