

# *Words and Deeds*

## THE SUM

Written by LIZZIE NUNNERY  
Directed by GEMMA BODINETZ  
*Liverpool Everyman Theatre*

Return of the Rep: after 25 years, the Everyman have returned to the practice of hiring a group of actors to perform a series of plays over a number of weeks – harking back to the days of Pete Postlethwaite and Julie Walters et al. That link with the past is also apparent in the themes of one of the pieces in this run, LIZZIE NUNNERY'S The Sum (directed by GEMMA BODINETZ), echoing the realism (although magical rather than gritty, according to Nunnery) of Alan Bleasdale's The Boys From The Blackstuff, referencing the Kirkby Rent Strikes and Margaret Thatcher... and yet the play is firmly anchored in the present, set as it is before and after the 2016 EU Referendum.

The Everyman's transition into a theatre in the round works extremely well for this play. In fact, it's amazing what one small area of stage can convey: the different areas represent McClasker's bedroom, garden, living room and kitchen departments, and the same areas of Eve's home, as well as other spaces. (Were they digging real soil out of the astroturf? It certainly looked like.) The music emanates from the central, sunken orchestra pit around which the action occurs, where Vidar Norheim and Martin Heslop reside, joined on occasion by various actors.

And the 'story'? Well, Eve (Laura Dos Santos) is fixated on numbers and sums – the kinds that rule our lives: the amounts we spend and what we need to survive. Going into the red is an ever-present fear – nay, reality. However, early humour indicates that the dispiriting subject matter will be leavened by some lighter moments, and indeed it is, for it's not Nunnery's way to be depressing: her optimistic attitude shines through, even whilst Eve is struggling under various sap-sucking pressures – troubled teen, mother in the early stages of dementia, slightly feckless partner, job going/gone and best friend seemingly lost to her. When it comes, the descent into selling what's left – parts of her body and herself – is skilfully handled, and is presented as 'just' another part of the equation: "The sum of me in black and red", although it is clearly much more than that.

Whilst the focus is on Eve and her family, Nunnery also incorporates vignettes showing the effects that redundancy has had on the other employees, not just the actuality of being unemployed, but the consequences for personal relationships and self-esteem, too. The supporting cast also get some great songs throughout: Steph (Keddy Sutton) delivers Zero Hour Blues in lovely, slightly husky tones, and Iris/Nan (Pauline Daniels) leaves us misty-eyed with I've Been Sleeping With The Dead. The play's musical aspect is also highlighted with the choreography for Forgive Me If I Smile The Day That Maggie Thatcher Died, the store's employees dancing with their mops and wheelie mop buckets, soliciting much laughter from the full house.

In the rousing final scene, Eve tells the gathered protesters: "They're selling us bad maths, and I'm angry". Nunnery's own voice seems strongest in this speech – playwright as polemicist, perhaps – but then, as she says, playwrights have a duty to be 'current', if not necessarily political. And isn't it time we were all angry – and galvanised into action?

*Let me turn your deeds into words*