



[REVIEW] JERUSALEM BY JEZ BUTTERWORTH

By Rachel Ang | Culture | 17 October 2014, Friday

When the main character introduces himself onstage with a dance while mixing a morning cocktail – milk, a raw egg, a dash of alcohol and a random bit of this and that – in a mug tucked in his belt, before proceeding to down the entire thing in one mouthful, you know you’re in for a pretty awesome time.

Brought to Singapore for the first time by **The Stage Club** under the delightfully naturalistic direction of **Nick Kenny** (*Bram Stoker's Dracula*, *Jeffrey Bernard is Unwell* and *Stones In His Pockets*), *Jerusalem* by **Jez Butterworth** is a highly-acclaimed production that is so essentially English. Set in a fictional town in Wiltshire, England, the story centres around **Johnny 'Rooster' Byron**, brought to full and feisty life by **Nick Cheadle** (I dare you not to think of Freddie Mercury).



From the arrival of two council officials (**Angela Barolsky** and **Rahul Mudgal**) to serve an eviction notice, we know from the onset that Johnny's little camp in the middle of the woods is doomed. This inevitability hangs over the festive mood of St. George's Day, even with the hubbub and life brought by the motley crew of local youths that hang around Johnny in the hopes of getting at alcohol and weed: **Ginger** the wanna-be DJ (**Edward John Rahtz**), **Lee** who is due to leave for Australia the next day (**Marlon Dance-Hooi**), two spirited young ladies **Pea** and **Tanya** (**Hannah Collins** and **Anisa Ghuloom**), as well as the older **Professor** (**Nick Perry**). Along the course of the play, Johnny is also visited by his former lover **Dawn** (**Liz Graves**) and the town thug, **Troy Whitworth** (**Shaun Quah**).



Yet Johnny's trailer site in the heart of the forest is more than just a typical venue for under-aged binge-drinking, vice and debauchery. It's where England's mountains green and pleasant pastures raise their raw spirit to face the 'dark Satanic Mills' of urbanisation – as in William Blake's poem '*And did those feet in ancient time*', sung by the elusive young **Phaedra** (**Lucy Bowen**) at the beginning of the play.

It is precisely this spirit – emulated in the beautiful and elaborate set, complete with surrounding trees, worn sofa, woodpile and smashed telly – that personifies itself in the protagonist (Johnny 'Rooster' Byron), whose untamed nature is reminiscent of the Romantic works of his namesake, Lord Byron.

Perhaps that is why legends edge into reality here. Fact and myth of the various tales told by the characters converge, from the Professor's long, rambling speeches and poetry recitals, to Ginger's recounts of Johnny's dare-devil deeds in the past. All the way to Johnny's own claim of being born immaculately on the point of a stray bullet, with the trademarks of all Byron boys: a full set of teeth, a black cape and a knife.

Just when the story of his encounter with a giant reaches the point of ludicrous, Johnny reveals the evidence, lying beneath their noses the entire time. Adding to this is the fact that Johnny's memory runs far deeper – recollecting people and an inexhaustible list of trivia from times past, despite his utter inability to recall smashing up his own brand new television.



It's into the promise of this almost-magic that people young and old come, some to frolic and have a good time, some to seek company, but some also to seek refuge and comfort when they're at their lowest, as demonstrated by the ridiculously-bedecked-and-belled **Wesley** (**Barry Woolhead**). Because even when the wild and unapologetic energy has been spent, there is a fatherly tenderness underneath, which we glimpse when Johnny dances with Phaedra.



"They need me, see, they need me," he tells his son **Markey** (played in turn by **Conor** and **Jamie Scherer**). And it's true. People do need the epic wonder that Johnny 'Rooster' Byron represents, and they gravitate toward him at the same time that they humiliate him for being unrefined.

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Watching Johnny defiantly declare war against change, weaving articulate curses, hammering his drum and invoking his heritage even as the stage lights dim upon him, we wish with all the weight of our nostalgia that the spell of Rooster's Wood is one that will never be broken.

EVENT DETAILS

Jerusalem

by *The Stage Club*

Date: 15 – 18 October 2014

Time: 7.30pm

Venue: DBS Arts Centre, Home of SRT

Rating: NC16 (Coarse language)

Admission: S\$42 (+S\$3 booking fee)

For more information and bookings, visit [SISTIC](#).

Cast list in order of appearance:

Lucy Bowen (Phaedra), Angela Barolsky (Ms Fawcett), Rahul Mudgal (Mr Parsons), Nick Cheadle (Johnny 'Rooster' Byron), Edward John Rahtz (Ginger), Nick Perry (Professor), Marlon Dance-Hooi (Lee), Paul McCracken (Davey), Hannah Collins (Pea), Anisa Ghuloom (Tanya), Barry Woolhead (Wesley), Liz Graves (Dawn), Conor & Jamie Scherer (Markey), Shaun Quah (Troy Whitworth), Josh Gitlitz and Neil Nanlal (Thug 1 & 2).

Image credits: *The Stage Club*



RACHEL ANG

Rachel loves to indulge in all things beautiful, and is fully appreciative of stories well told, regardless of medium or form. As an Arts Writer for *Poached Mag*, she hopes her words can contribute to the articulation and advancement of the arts scene.

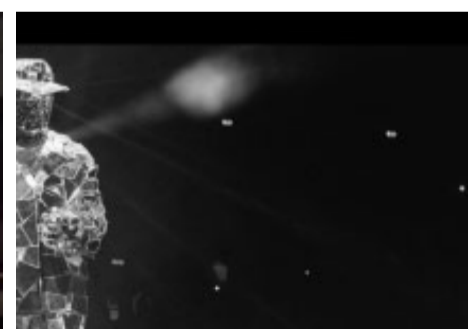
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