

# Operation Black Antler review at the Brighton Festival – ‘politically charged’



A scene from Operation Black Antler

Reviews Theatre by Tim Bano - May 8, 2016

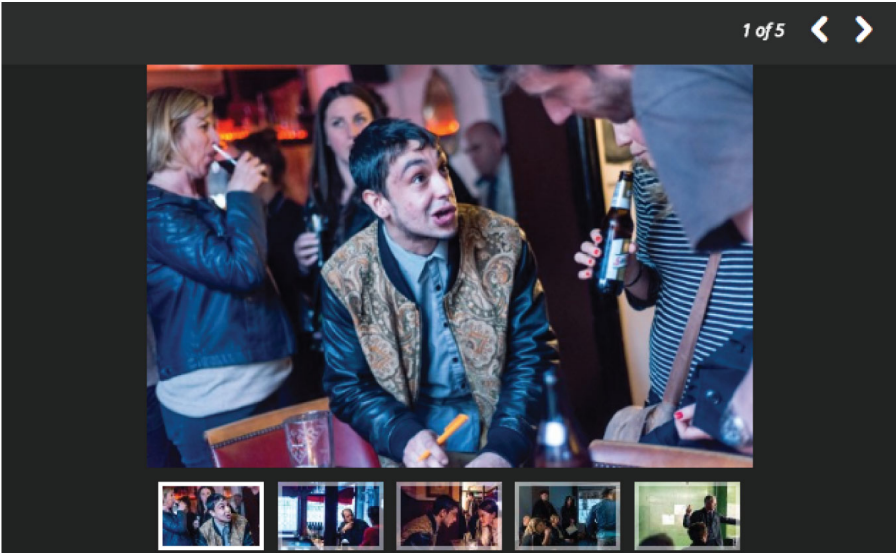
Despite calls for cancellation and boycott due to badly-worded marketing copy, Operation Black Antler, this politically charged collaboration between Blast Theory and Hydrocracker is one of the more thoughtful and sensitive examples of immersive theatre. By planting its audiences as undercover agents attempting to infiltrate a party in a pub, it reflects on the rise of far right groups in the UK and the tactics that police employ to bring them down.

The grounded, realistic scenario into which audience members are immersed is well-judged: this isn't some secret, high tech band of super villains; it's misguided and frustrated people in a pub in Brighton.

For a lot of the time, it simply involves standing around with a drink and chatting to the performers. A uniformly excellent cast means that it's almost impossible to tell who's an actor and who's not. All are replete with backstory and well equipped to deal with chatty, probing audience members.

The show rewards participants for their commitment, for saying whatever's necessary to gain the characters' trust. It knows its likely liberal audience, pitching its characters as variants on bigotry, some chatting about lockdowns of borders, some insisting on 'integration rather than occupation'.

Production information	
Production	Operation Black Antler
Venue	Secret location
City	Brighton
Starts	May 7, 2016
Ends	May 28, 2016
Press night	May 7, 2016
Authors	Matt Adams, Jem Wall, Richard Hahlo, Ju Row Farr, Nick Tandavanitj
Director	Matt Adams, Jem Wall, Richard Hahlo, Ju Row Farr, Nick Tandavanitj
Stage manager	Gabriel Burden
Production manager	Paul Dungwort
Cast includes	Jem Wall, Hywel Simons, Kayla Meikle, Natasha Magigi, Laurie Jamieson, Richard Hahlo, Sarah-Jayne Butler
Producer	Hydrocracker and Blast Theory
Running time	2hrs



We have to decide whether even saying something racist is a step too far, regardless of the intention behind it. And yet the buzz of the game niggles in the background, the temptation to do and say whatever is necessary to proceed with the mission.

That safety net, the knowledge that this is just a show, mutes some of the message about state-sanctioned spying and, perhaps, risks trivialising a serious message. The denouement, too, is a bit of a squib, with no proper debrief and no implication that our actions have had consequences. But taking part in the show becomes a tricky choice between the lesser of two evils: corruptible undercover agents, or contemptible far-right activists.

## Verdict

Thought-provoking and superbly performed immersive experience with a political charge

