

The Argus

Brighton Festival theatre piece slammed "deeply insensitive" by activists



Promotional image for Operation Black Antler.

A THEATRE piece about undercover police has been slammed as “deeply insensitive” and a “disgrace” by activists before its debut at the [Brighton Festival](#).

Operation Black Antler is being premiered at the 50th anniversary edition of the annual month-long multi-arts season but has been the subject of controversy.

Critics said the production made light of the issues surrounding undercover police infiltrating and forming relationships, even having children, with targets – saying the piece glorified the abuse.

The immersive theatre piece sees participants assuming the roles of undercover officers at a protest meeting.

But campaigners have accused the production companies Hydrocracker and Blast Theory of trivialising the issue.

Dozens of people posted on Twitter and Facebook being critical of the event and the way it was described in the Festival's programme as a "thrilling" experience was insensitive.

These are issues currently being looked at by the Undercover Policing Inquiry being chaired by Lord Justice Pitchford.

Matt Adams, from Blast Theory, said the piece is not "telling the story of the squad or the women, or the protest and we have ourselves to blame for that connection".

He said: "We certainly made a mistake in our publicity material and we apologise for that. "We felt it had been a bit thoughtless in the way that it was worded.

"Obviously the response has then gone on to whether this is even justifiable and that is A much more nuanced discussion about whether you can make an immersive project which deals with issues like this and whether it is even appropriate – that is something we have differing views on from the activists.

"We are in discussions with groups and individuals and these are very constructive and differing views on from the activists.

"We are in discussions with groups and individuals and these are very constructive and ongoing.

"We are interested in hearing their views and are looking to learn at each stage."

Operation Black Antler sees participants summoned to a secret location to meet their police handler before assuming the role of an undercover officer from a first-hand perspective.

As part of the festival the issues are also being debated by a panel of speakers from the production and the [University of Brighton](#).

Mr Adams added: "What we trying to do is create a powerful experience for people and one that tries to explore the complexities around this question, the areas of which are not completely black and white.

"I do hope we are able to re-assure people we are not making something glib that fails to acknowledge the crimes which have taken place or the impacts of those involved which are profound, life changing and distressing."

