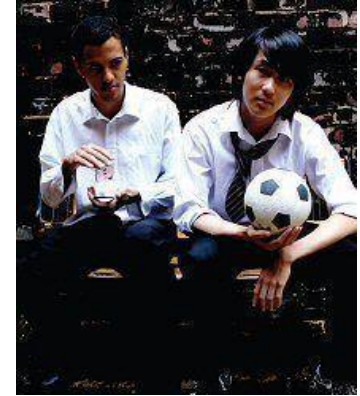


British Theatre Guide

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Double Bill: Magical Chairs / There's Only One Wayne Lee

Mary Mazzilli / Roy Williams

Lumenis Theatre in association with Southwark Playhouse

Southwark Playhouse

(2011)

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This double bill, which Lumenis Theatre are taking to the Beijing International Fringe Festival later in the month, pairs two very different plays about young people.

Mary Mazzilli's *Magical Chairs* is an intriguing fantasy that mirrors the struggles of aspiring youngsters through two would-be magicians stuck in a room of abandoned chairs. It captures the frustration which arises when ability does not quite match aims, how the ego rewrites the rules and the peer rivalry as a couple of compete. Is success freeing oneself from the shackles that bind you or learning to live with them?

Trapped in a Godot-like limbo, the success of this piece with its absurdist stance and its repetitions depends upon the playing and as the Competent and Incompetent Magicians (though which is which seems to change as the piece progresses) Chris Chan and

Alexandre Ross pull it off. Director Jonathan Man punctuates the action with a physicality that hints at some obscure meaning and emphasises that restless waiting for the chance to get on with grown-up life.

There's *Only One Wayne Lee* is a slight reworking by Roy Williams of his *There's Only One Wayne Matthews*, with the titular character now a Chinese schoolboy, so that its concern with racial prejudice becomes wider than in the original. Chan plays Wayne and Ross his idol, the school's soccer star Carl, a black lad who feels he's really only good at football. As well as these the two actors play all the other roles, school teachers, parents, siblings, mates, girl friends, rivals and bullies and they are a dab hand (or rather boot) at the footie too.

It's a fast moving piece, rapidly changing scene, character and mood from Wayne's home where his father is still stricken with grief over Wayne's mother's death, to assembly hall, classroom or ball court Their characterizations show adults and older siblings as seen from the boy's point of view, leading to some deliberately crude but very amusing portrayals, especially of girls and teachers and the gentle but wimpish ex-public schoolboy whom Wayne befriends.

There is a touching hopelessness about Ross's Carl while Chan's Wayne bursts with growing confidence. It points up both how cruel and how close kids can be. Perhaps things have changed a little since on the racial front since the end of the 1970s when this is set but its picture of living with difference, whether in ethnic origin or ability, is still sharply drawn and too frequently still true .

The effectiveness of Jonathan Man's energetic production is greatly helped by a soundtrack of music and effects by Ruth Chan and Simon McCabe that can range from a metronomic ticking to mark the tedium of the classroom to full-throated football crowds and both plays are supported by complex lighting plots from Roland Glasser.

"Magical Chairs" and "There's Only One Wayne Lee" run at the Southwark Playhouse until 3rd September before going to the Beijing International Fringe Festival 2011.

Howard Loxton