



Heart Of Darkness



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[Buzz Magazine](#)



Heart Of Darkness opens with a scene in which Marlow gives a slide show of over 80 new plant species he has named, praising the value of classification as a means of control. How ironic, then, that Give It A Name's play so consistently eludes classification, and buries its secrets deep in the heart of a production that ultimately evades its audience.

That the audience is literally divided upon entry may well be a playful nod to their reception of the piece. Director James Williams has constructed a powerful production that deliberately disorients and disrupts its audience from the moment they step inside the venue, separating the production into two rooms and, in turn, two slightly different plays. The play retells the story of Joseph Conrad's *Heart Of Darkness* through actors Dean Rehman, Sule Rimi and John Norton, but it also interweaves histories and stories that explore the legacy of imperialism. What emerges is not the whole of *Heart Of Darkness*, but rather a number of scenes from the book, and a curious series of anachronistic touches that bring the narrative into the 21st century.

The contemporary, abrasive soundtrack thrills as much as it unsettles, and much of the staging is bleak and sparse, with penetrating shafts of light, swinging light bulbs and empty stairwells. The audience are also a part of the set, as characters weave in and out of them as if negotiating the African jungle, which comes to a head in the final basement scene, where the actors tear around the basement, jumping on sofas and swinging from



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the ceiling. Their conviction and authority give the play an eerie intensity that complements the setting.

Other aspects of the play were less successful. Allusions to contemporary issues left the audience pondering their relevance. Late in the play, an email exchange described the exploitation of African nations via government loans on a laptop in the basement, visible to those brave enough to peek over the shoulder of the nervy corporate executive whose body language mirrors that of Kurtz and Marlow. A comment on neo-imperialism, perhaps, but these scenes felt only half-formed, and made for unnecessary diversions in a narrative that was by now growing increasingly fragmented.

If the audience had expected some assistance from our guide, we were out of luck. His brusque tone added a curious comfort to the proceedings, but it quickly emerged that he too was ultimately in thrall to the imperialism that dominated the play. It's a nice touch that the audience's realisation that they will have to depend upon their own observation mirrors Marlow's observation of the jungle in which he is travelling, and of his suspicion that he is descending into an absurd world.

Yet while Marlow's observations bring him to understand the dissolution of the boundaries between civilized and savage, the audience's observations bring them only to the conclusion that the play has become increasingly confused. The actors run around us in the basement, and act out roles that are at times set centuries apart, and it's difficult to say what these add to the story. For those who did not have prior knowledge of the plot, this must have been maddening. A descent into absurdity, maybe, but there is no method to its madness.

In a production that disorientates as much as it thrills, we eventually find ourselves abandoning all guidance whatsoever, running around the darkened basement of 10 Feet Tall, engaging with the stories that are rapidly unfolding, and searching in vain not for Mr. Kurtz, but for the beating heart of the play.



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Helia Phoenix

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Like anyone interested in post-colonial theory (though for me it's through having Iranian parents), I recognise and deal with notions of racism, separatism and modern colonialism everyday, but all I think you need is a nominal understanding of modern day world politics to appreciate the depictions that were on show in Heart of Darkness. It was a contemporary re-imagination of a classic tale. And I thought it was bloody brilliant.