



The Paper Birds

Session 3:

Post-show Discussions

Post-show welcome from Jemma...



Click video above!

Writing notes!

Write a list of any questions, thoughts or observations you had about the show.

Was there anything you weren't clear on?

Which bits were memorable and why?

What did you feel at different moments in the show?

What were your thoughts about the set and aesthetic?



Post-show Q&A with Cast & Creatives...



Meet the team – click video above!

Reviews

The Stage - Feb 5 2020

“Big-hearted show buoyed by beautiful music”

With oceans of information available at your fingertips, is it actually any easier to find a real answer? Inspired by the magazine problem pages of their own youth, the Paper Birds’ Ask Me Anything is based on the letters the company exchanged with young people across the country. What questions did they have? Could the show provide answers?

Previewed last July and since revised, it’s set in an amalgam of teenage bedrooms (Rebecca Wood’s colourful, chaotic design is a delight), with input from an Alexa-Siri style-screen that provides commentary throughout.

The likeable, engaging cast members filter their responses through their own experience: Kylie Perry through a mock teen TV show, Georgie Coles through her old diaries, and musician Rosie Doonan through song. Recorded clips from others address the limits of that experience – for example, discussing what it’s like to be a black gay man or a biracial woman.

Well-meaning as it is, not everything coheres. The production feels occasionally disjointed and unevenly paced, and Doonan’s haunting vocals are underused. But it deftly balances humour with treating subjects from sex to suicide with sensitivity and care, and there are moments of real power. It asks not just what it is to be young today, but what is it that adults owe the younger generation, while recognising there is no easy one-size-fits-all solution.

But one message comes through clearly: at a time when young voices are drowned out in a landscape of constant online noise, it’s more important than ever to really listen.

Reviews

The Times – Thursday February 06 2020

This coming of age drama is performed with warmth and an infectious energy

Back in the pre-internet age it was de rigueur for teenagers seeking advice on everything from medical matters to sex and relationships to write letters to the agony pages of magazines such as *Just Seventeen*. If this process sounds quaint and unwieldy, it at least raised the prospect of a single, authoritative reply rather than the myriad provided by any Google search.

The venerable magazine advice column is a key inspiration for this new devised show from the Paper Birds. The company invited teenagers from around the UK to ask questions on any subject, which the director Jemma McDonnell and her cast, mostly in their twenties and thirties, here attempt to reply.

Among the 100-odd letters received by the company, the queries go from the workaday (“how do you pay tax?” “What even is a mortgage?”) via the intimate (“does having sex hurt?”) to more involved inquiries about coping with bereavement and navigating complex racial or gender identities.

Unsurprisingly, there is a degree of comic mileage in the company’s exploration of the lighter aspects of adolescent experience. The performer Georgie Coles shares extracts from her teenage diary, which range from the sweetly banal to a raging sense of injustice. Kylie Perry revisits her coming of age through the medium of a spot-on pastiche of an angst-ridden teenage drama.

As the ensemble acknowledges, some of the issues they were tasked with looking into fell so far outside their experience that they had to draw on the wisdom of friends and loved ones, whose advice, relayed by video and often pithily eloquent, provides some of the more moving aspects of the show.

Reviews

The Guardian – Thu 6 Feb 2020

A trio of actors try to provide answers for teenagers' anxieties in Paper Birds' razor-sharp show

One teenager wants to know when you're ready to have a baby. Another wonders if he'll ever be accepted as black and gay. A third complains about the older generation writing off the young as stupid screen addicts. All of them want to know about having sex for the first time. Georgie Coles, Rosie Doonan and Kylie Perry of Paper Birds have gamely offered to answer these questions and more. Trying to fill the vacuum left by the Just Seventeen problem page, they wrote to groups of young people around the country with a promise to listen to their concerns. Ask Me Anything, an emotionally powerful show, is their response.

But something is amiss. At first it feels as though they're just teasing us, delaying their answers to these niggling questions for dramatic effect. They filibuster entertainingly, bantering with the audience, revisiting their own teenage years through a make-believe sitcom and joining in with Doonan's soul-baring songs about becoming a mother.

We do get direct answers to some of the questions, but although the performers appear to be edging towards an honest sharing of their own experience, they are also evasive. And so they should be: their conceit is flawed. Society is not divided between those with questions and those with answers. We are all flailing about, improvising, making it up as we go along. Yes, you can ask these women anything, but the longer their performance goes on, the more they realise there's only so much they can tell you.

From a technical point of view, Jemma McDonnell's production is razor sharp. The AV design by the Media Workshop mixes WhatsApp chats with Alexa-style interjections and recorded interviews, all with startling precision.

Cleverly, the show spins on its axis and redefines its own terms. The grownups can offer empathy, a kindly ear or a shoulder to cry on, but solutions are harder to come by. Their call instead for a conversation – a genuine exchange – feels humble, mature and quietly radical.

Write a Review

Write your own review of the show.

Think about...

What happens in the show?

Can you explain what the show is about?

What does the show sound, look and feel like?

What was impactful about the show?

What was problematic about the show?

