

See below our Young Reviewers' reviews for The Shy Manifesto, performed at Harrogate Theatre Studio on Monday 4th March.

The chosen review, written by Sophie Robinson, was published in the Harrogate Advertiser on Thursday 21st March:

Michael Ross' newest project certainly doesn't shy away from the challenging topics of today

If you are ever able to encounter an individual that can grip the attention of a room for over an hour, then you need to take that individual and cast him in a one man show that has the potential to change your outlook on life. Thankfully, writer Michael Ross and director Cat Robey found their prodigy in the form of recent RADA graduate Theo Ancient, who takes on the role of Callum in the 2019 UK tour of 'The Shy Manifesto'. Ancient delivers Ross' lines with a fierce potency that never seems to ebb or tire, and this further accentuates Ross' apparent attempt to relate to a modern audience. This attempt succeeds.

The Shy Manifesto's offer of an insight into the workings of a self-effacing teenage boy, a narrative not much observed on the stage. Alongside a bold commentary on male sexual assault these themes hint at a ground-breaking piece of theatre. In a 'MeToo' era, Ross manages to create an angle that presents the viewpoint of the guilty party in a situation that shifts the audience's moral compass, begging the question "is sympathy felt towards our beloved Callum?" Watching this seemingly inconspicuous teen struggle with the consequences of his actions being smeared all over Twitter resonates with my social media generation. Ross expertly captures the pressures and standards implemented by our teenage selves and more than once I feel myself welling up at Ancient's distressing monologue.

The Shy Manifesto, however, is not without flaws. The archaic cliché representation of the 'token' gay boy in Callum's class leaves a bitter taste in my mouth, and I feel almost let down by this flaw. It seems as if Ross is writing for a forward-thinking audience; a forward-thinking audience from 1983.

Overall the Shy Manifesto seems to be here to stay, and as one famous socialist revolutionary (almost) said: 'a spectre is haunting England- the spectre of shyness.'

Sophie Robinson, St. Aidan's C of E High School

A review of 'The Shy Manifesto' by Michael Ross

Performed as part of a UK tour at Harrogate Theatre on Monday 4th March at 19:45

Here are the other Women-Wise reviews:

Flying the flag for the introverts?

This one-man play highlights the remarkable talent of Theo Ancient, playing Callum, who creates a convincing and empathetic character, maintaining indescribable energy from beginning to end.

Sauntering into the cosy studio in Harrogate Theatre we immediately see Callum, perched calmly, yet intensely reading and writing whilst the audience took to their seats. Effortlessly humorous puns and jokes forces almost everyone to smile, if not release a little chuckle to themselves! However, I did feel a pang of guilt for laughing when what he expresses is genuinely tragic and saddening to hear from a 17 year old boy, wrestling with cripplingly low self esteem and confidence. Indeed, when he refers to the only school party he attended he states "But actually the real reason was: for research purposes.". Furthermore, the vulnerability of the character as he rapidly pours his thoughts and emotions onto the stage is both touching and uncomfortable to witness.

The subject matter is heavy with Callum describing his shy and awkward traits, but the way he interweaves his toy figures as props to represent his peers successfully lightens the mood. The performance explores the important issues for the younger generations regarding the dangers of social media, binge drinking and cyber bullying; leaving the youngsters of this era with 'food for thought'. It is also worth noting the effectiveness of Alistair Lax's sound design and Charlie Morgan Jones' lighting design, which compliments the characters emotions perfectly creating prominent poignant and wild moments.

Ultimately, Theo Ancient had me in the palm of his hand throughout this faultless coming-of-age comedy drama which is imaginative, inspiring and exhilarating. The overriding message for me as a 16 year old girl, is accept people for who they are, whether that be an extrovert or introvert.

The Shy manifesto was performed at Harrogate Theatre on the 4th March 2019.

Maisie Jackson, King James's School

A **Bold** Performance from 'The Shy Manifesto'

Excellent written by Michael Ross, the Shy Manifesto advocates introversion, encourages shyness and campaigns for more people to adopt the reserved lifestyle. Seventeen-year-old Callum, played superbly by Theo Ancient (Harry Potter and the Cursed Child), has very fixed – and often hilarious - ideas about how the world should work. During this time of chaos, the last thing he believes we need is for shy people to “come out of their shell” – to use his most hated phrase. He simply does not want to stop being shy and is very content with the way he is thank-you-very-much. An exciting or exhilarating life could not repulse him more. Callum comedically recalls events that obtrude his memory using an eclectic mix of objects from around his room, assisted by mind-blowing sound and lighting, to tell his story. One such is the entertaining retelling of the character assassination – to put it lightly – from his despised Aunt Libby, a woman who bonded with his mum through post-natal yoga classes. After eleven years she is suddenly convinced he has Asperger's after reading 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time'.

Told entirely through monologue, Theo multi-roles with such talent and burlesque the audience cannot help but be transported into Callum's world – which turns out to be very chaotic for somebody seemingly so withdrawn. After a short while, it becomes apparent that memories of a previous night's drunken escapade are beginning to dominate his mind, threatening the shy identity he has so carefully created around himself.

Whilst this play ingeniously shows that we can never truly know who we are until we break free from our comfort zones, it also challenges the role of social media, as it becomes apparent that Callum was not as isolated as he initially portrays. However he does not realise until it is too late.

Using a combination of incredible acting with twists of comedy, the audience walked away challenged, and crucially; reconsidering the importance of embracing shyness. An exceptional performance!

Hannah Winter, GSAL

'The Shy Manifesto': Introverts Unite!

As an introvert living in a world seemingly dominated by extroverts, it can be hard sometimes not to feel overlooked. But for 17 year old Callum, this invisible existence is much more preferable than the wild parties and drunken nights out in glitzy Bournemouth that his friends seem to crave. A brilliant coming-of-age comedy, Michael Ross' 'The Shy Manifesto' leaves nothing out. Exploring a range of adolescent problems; from struggles with body image and self-identity, to questioning your sexuality, director Cat Robey provides us with a funny and compact performance that perfectly describes what it is like to grow up in the social media age.

Impressive up and coming actor Theo Aitken is one to watch, and his performance cannot be faulted. He delivers a hilarious yet poignant monologue, addressing the audience as his fellow shy 'comrades', a recurring theme throughout the performance, whilst he recounts his tale of woe. His performance as an anxious and angsty teen is compelling, and accurately portrays the stress of constantly being surrounded by social media and how it can sometimes be used against you. As we live in an increasingly modernised world, cyber-bullying is a topic that is sometimes pushed to the back of the newspapers, but 'The Shy Manifesto' provides the audience with a new awareness of this issue, which is at the forefront of all wary parents' minds.

Charlotte Henery's witty staging and prop design provides a spot of comic relief for the audience, with other characters and their personalities reduced to simplistic props: Callum's nemesis, effortless cool boy Gilby, is represented by a pair of rather scratched Ray Bans, whereas his mother's busybody friend Libby is shown as a rather obnoxious leather handbag. This ingenious set design pairs wonderfully with Callum's tragic tale of an ill-fated night out which ultimately ended in tears, and with the most embarrassing moment of his short life so far plastered all over the internet for everyone to see. The carefully fabricated identity that Callum has created for himself comes crashing down after one too many beers, and 'The Shy Manifesto' tells the story of how the timid, the artistic and the gentle are sometimes shunned and alienated, with society generally preferring the athletic and outspoken.

Overall, 'The Shy Manifesto' is a triumphant declaration of identity; it really delivers the message to stand up for what you believe in, no matter what people might think. Callum's ordeals as a shy person are something that is rarely seen on the stage, and every audience member can relate to his hardship. An incredibly well conveyed piece, 'The Shy Manifesto' is witty yet serious, teaching the audience an important lesson on learning to love yourself just the way you are.

'The Shy Manifesto' was shown at Harrogate Theatre on Monday 4th March 2019, and is currently touring the rest of the UK.

Adrienne Ives, Harrogate Ladies College