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HIKIKOMORI - THE SHELTER

Joris Mathieu with Haut et Court collective

FOR ALL AGE GROUPS, 8 AND ABOVE

RUNNING TIME : 55 MIN

PRESS REVIEW



THÉÂTRE
NOUVELLE
GÉNÉRATION
CENTRE DRAMATIQUE
NATIONAL - LYON



Week 53: Hikikomori - The Shelter - The Lowry, Salford

Week 53, The Lowry, Salford, Hikikomori - The Shelter, Haut et Court Collective, Philippe Chareyon, Vincent Hermano, Marion Talotti



The Lowry Theatre and Gallery is celebrating its 18th birthday this year and during this time the 'Ship Canal Guggenheim' has flourished and developed into an integral part of the northern arts scene. To commemorate this landmark birthday, the theatre has curated 'Week 53 - A Festival for the Compulsively Curious', showcasing new and challenging work from around the world. The celebrations opened last night with 'Hikikomori - The Shelter', a work by the Haut et Court Collective from Lyon, which illustrates the festival theme of 'Coming of Age' in a fractured technology based 21st Century.

Hikikomori is a Japanese term describing the acute social withdrawal of adolescents and young adults from social life and society at large, they will often retire into their bedroom and refuse to interact with anyone. Like myself, some of the audience last night were parents of teenagers and a frisson of recognition of this type of behaviour went around the theatre.

The premise was simply drawn with the characters being restricted to Nils (Philippe Chareyon) and his parents (Vincent Hermano and Marion Talotti), but we were invited to follow the inner monologue of only ONE of the characters, through headphones given to the audience prior to the show. The selection of the character you followed was randomly assigned and therefore allowed you one perspective on the unfolding story on the stage, each interpretation being wildly different according to which character you were allotted.

As a theatrical conceit this was brilliantly executed, I was drawn into the story from the perspective of Nils and a tale of bullying and social isolation followed; an inability to talk properly to his parents pushing him into a virtual world where he lived in his own 'forest', increasingly identifying as his animal totem spirit. I was accompanied to this production by my 17 year old daughter, and she was assigned the character of the father, looking at the piece through the eyes of a confused and angry man who was desperate to teach his son the life lessons his father had handed down to him, but was stymied by the lack of ability to communicate effectively in the modern digital world. Given the choice, we would undoubtedly have chosen the others perspective, but in retrospect, seeing the behaviour from the others viewpoint was extremely instructive. It was illustrative of how drawn in by the story we were, that both of us looked, without success, for someone who watched the show through the eyes of the mother!



The spare nature of the stage performance contrasted beautifully against the use of technology throughout, using digital imagery to create immensely lifelike representations of the totem animals that each character was represented by. Animal spirits resonate throughout world mythology and literature from Norse and American through to Rowling and Pullman and they were intelligently illustrative of character here. The Director Joris Mathieu meshed these scenes with the live action in a visually stunning way and only afterwards when we discovered the missing parts of the story could I fully appreciate how cleverly this was manipulated.

The deliberate ambiguity with which the show concluded (again, according to perspective) was indicative of the central message that we never know the whole story in life, and our understanding is based on our own experience and partial knowledge. As Mathieu concludes 'There are as many ways to understand our existence as there are ways to exist.'

The purpose of Week 53 is to challenge patrons of the Lowry to 'Stay Curious' and explore exciting new developments in theatre and live performance. Judging by the excited chatter and post show discussion of the themes and perspectives, with Hikikomori they have succeeded beyond reasonable expectation.

Verdict: Hikikomori rewards your curiosity with an innovative and thought provoking analysis of modern social mores. <https://www.thelowry.com/events/week-53-hikikomori>

Reviewer: Paul Wilcox

Reviewed: 17th May 2018

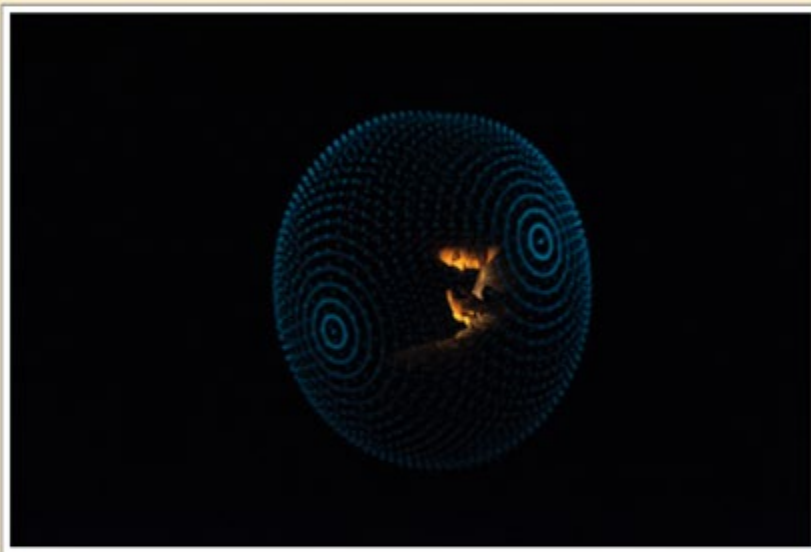
North West End Rating: ★★★★★

HIKIKOMORI – THE SHELTER

Joris Mathieu with Haut et Court Collective

Lowry

17 May 2018 to 18 May 2018



HIKIKOMORI – THE SHELTER

'On the other side of the door, outside my room, nobody misses me,' says schoolboy Nils. Yet outside, his mother sits and worries what to do, and his father waits. As audience members we listen to the words through headphones. We can choose which of the three narratives to follow. Schoolchildren in the audience listen intently to the mother. The father's thoughts are described as abstract and strange. I hear the words of Nils himself, as he describes his story of withdrawal from society - hikikomori - and self-confinement to his bedroom. It is estimated that in Japan half a million people have withdrawn in this way.

The success of this play comes from a mix of engaging storytelling and clever staging, all the while forging a feeling of isolation and absence of communication. The father and mother sit at opposite ends of the narrow strip along the front of the stage. Nils is offstage for much of the performance, in the bedroom at his mother's end. She must knock to pass items back and forth into the room. A huge window in the centre of the set allows live action to be carefully blended with video and projection to create what are really stunning effects, to present a surreal and at times magical picture.

The production doesn't pretend to offer solutions, instead asking questions. Are Nils' parents really to blame for his isolation, both emotionally at home or socially at school? Is withdrawal a valid path in the transition from child to adult? To what extent is technology encouraging us to be physically alone although digitally connected? Can a moose outfit change your life? I would have been fascinated to hear the mother's response. Then the father's. Yet the restriction to one voice truly reflects the fragmented nature of our lives and the inability to know each other's thoughts.

An impressive performance and a chance to see something very thought provoking, using innovative theatre techniques to tell a compelling story.

Reviewer: David Murray

Review: Hikikomori – The Shelter – Week 53 at The Lowry

📅 May 19, 2018 👤 kristobel



Credit: Nicolas Boudier

REVIEWER: DANIEL SHIPMAN

UPSTAGED RATING: ★★★★★

It's an exciting time to be a theatre goer. Technology is rapidly changing what it is possible to achieve on a stage, and companies like Haut et Court are making full use of these new opportunities with shows like *Hikikomori*.

The plot revolves around Nils – a teenage boy who decides to lock himself in his room – and his parents, but the plot here takes a back seat to intelligently designed atmosphere. Upon entering the theatre, audience members are given a headset which plays the interior monologue of one of the three characters, but you don't know which until the show begins.

This lack of narrative or certainty creates a productive disorientation – it allows you to empathise with Nils's isolation or his parents' confusion so much more deeply than even the best acting, as you are sincerely feeling those same emotions yourself.

You quickly become invested in your assigned character – knowing only their thoughts and motivations and being forced to guess those of the other characters. This emulates the frustrations of real adolescence. My headphones were linked to Nils, and his justifications made his outlandish behaviour seemed almost normal, whilst those listening to other narratives perhaps thought he was a cruel monster to his parents.

The acting is almost secondary to this genius device, but the delicate touch which all three performers apply compliments it perfectly. Marion Talotti as the mother is a particular joy to watch. Similarly, Nicholas Thevenet's score – a gentle hum of electronic rhythms and broken melodies – provides the ideal aural complement to the sparse set (Nicolas Boudier, Joris Mathieu).

Hikikomori is a sonic, visual and theatrical feast – the absolute best of what you want to see when you take a chance on new theatre.

-Daniel Shipman

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