

Review: Dog Days

A crime becomes news, becoming a film, becoming a play. James Soldan's examination of media action transfixes the Drama Barn with twisted thrill. [Lucie Parker](#) reviews

Friday 15 March 2013

The robbery should've taken ten minutes. Eight hours later it was the hottest thing on live T.V.

And it's all true.



Writer and Director: James Soldan

Producer: Katie Lambert

Venue: Drama Barn

Dates: 14th and 16th March

Rating: ★★★★★

Dog Days is York University's own entry into the Inter-University Drama Festival, which sees the congregation of eight universities from across Britain into the enchantingly intimate space of our one and only drama barn. Each university has been allocated a 45 minute window through which to shine, and *Dog Days* certainly does this. Its sharp and fast-paced dialogue reverberates around the barn, forming the haphazard platform upon which the recreation of the events that inspired Sidney Lumet's 1975 film *Dog Day Afternoon* took place.

On August 22nd 1972 John S. Wojtowicz robbed the Chase Manhattan bank in downtown Brooklyn. Not an unusual crime, he intended for it to take ten minutes, however eight hours later the desperate failings of his botched ideas were still being broadcast on television. An event so infamous it inspired an Oscar nominated film, James Soldan's narrative reconstructs what took place on that historic day. He uses Wojtowicz (Jason Ryall) himself to re-enact the robbery, setting out the arena in which Wojtowicz can lay down his gun and narrate the true events of that day away from the smorgasbord of media misrepresentations and sensationalised mistruths. With the fantastic mechanism in place of using the cashiers and bank manager to help piece together the recreation alongside Wojtowicz, Soldan successfully creates the twisted, sweat-inducing confusion faced by all on that notorious day.



John Wojtowicz in Brooklyn, 1972

The set encapsulates the conflict between Wojtowicz's prediction of a simple ten minute robbery and the complex reality of the crime as hyped up by the media perfectly. The black floor with simple blueprints shows the lay out of the bank through the eyes of a bank robber, with the actors dancing around invisible shelves and desks. Yet the use of a projector to show film footage was a stark reminder of the tension between simplicity and complexity here. The only flaw is in the end scene, where a final projection is played to bookend the first, yet the positioning of the cast blocks out this image for those sitting on the left of the Barn, leaving the audience in a state of uninformed confusion.

Ryall gives a strong performance of Wojtowicz, warming up to dominate the barn with his anxiously erratic and irate moods that were effectively juxtaposed by the presence of his shivering sidekick Sal (Toby King). Bland bank manager Barrett (Peter Fisher) and his entourage of female cashiers were superb in using their roles as witnesses to haunt Wojtowicz with their conflicting memories. Shirley (Lily Cooper) and Julia (Rosie Brear) in particular contributed to the essence of Wojtowicz's angst with their wonderfully acted combination of contentious jibes and concerned queries.



Al Pacino stars as Wojtowicz, 1975

The main theme of media distortion was thrown into the spotlight and remained caught between the parallels of realism and idealism for the duration of the play, evoking sympathy for the criminal facing centre-stage with the tatters of his former ideas and beliefs lying shredded around him. This theme is something that strongly resonates with the audience, leaving a lasting impression as we remember the frenzied and ferocious world we live in today, where the growth of the media monster has reared its ugly head, constantly creating scandal and upset wherever it decides to stomp.



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