

Good grief, Charlie Brown

THEATRE

The characters from Peanuts hit their teenage years in *Dog Sees God*

If there's one comic strip forever rooted in the muddy knees and little leagues of youth, it's Charles M Schultz's *Peanuts*. Over its 50-year lifespan, until Schultz's death in 2000, the tales of Charlie Brown, his chums and their home-spun philosophising came to embody an innocent slice of Americana. From time to time, though, even the strip's most devoted fan must have secretly wished for something – anything – to change in Charlie Brown's twee little world.

► **It's a parody. It looks at their lives as teenagers and explores what's happened to them** ◀

And now it has. First performed off-Broadway in 2004, Bert V Royal's play, *Dog Sees God: Confessions Of A Teenage Blockhead*, asks the intriguing question: what would happen if the *Peanuts* gang grew up?

'It's a parody,' smiles Craig Hepworth, co-founder of Vertigo Productions, which is staging the play's UK premiere this week. 'It looks at their lives as teenagers and explores what's happened to them. It's a comedy but it's laced with dark undertones.'

Well, not quite undertones. Unauthorised by Schultz's estate, *Dog Sees God* tackles themes of homophobia, drugs and mental



*Dog gone: Snoopy is no longer alive in *Dog Sees God*, in which the characters from *Peanuts* turn out to be wayward teenagers*

illness. It attracted a flurry of horrified headlines in New York, but also a string of high-profile actors (including Buffy's Eliza Dushku and *Lost*'s Ian Somerhalder), so securing the UK's first showing was a coup for a not-for-profit local company.

'It actually happened by accident,' explains Hepworth. 'We were writing a play but the script wasn't coming together. We heard about *Dog Sees God* through a friend. So we posted on a theatre website and within an hour Bert V Royal got in touch. He sent us the script, allowed

us the rights, and we just fell in love with it.'

So what exactly happens? 'We basically catch up with CB [Charlie Brown's name in the play due to copyright issues] after his dog, who we all know as Snoopy, has died. He tries to find some kind solace from his friends but they are all a bit wayward.'

All of them – even Lucy? 'A pyromaniac.' Linus? 'A pot-head.' Woodstock? 'Dead, he was killed by Snoopy.' So it's definitely not all kites in trees. However, as Hepworth

is keen to point out, there are parallels between the play and the cartoon strip.

'Bert's done a great job at linking up their personalities; you can really look back and see where the characters have come from,' he explains. 'In the cartoon, for example, Charlie Brown is always going to Lucy's psychiatry booth and asking questions about himself. In the play it's become even worse; he's still looking for the answers.'

Dog Sees God is the first Vertigo Theatre production not devised by

the company. Part of Manchester's fringe theatre scene, the company was set up in 2004 by Hepworth and his friend Adele Stanhope to perform plays aimed at an audience aged between 18 and 35. 'I'd been in theatre for a long time and I was bored of doing other people's shows, so I decided to do it myself. We don't do it for money, we do it because we love it.'

James Stanley
Thu to Sat, Taurus, 1 Canal Street, Central Manchester, 8pm, mat Sat 5pm, £5.50. Tel: 0870 428 0785. www.vertigotheatreproductions.co.uk

GIG

Be Your Own Pet

When *Be Your Own Pet* first appeared in 2006, their ages garnered almost as much attention as their music. The Nashville four-piece were all 18 or under at the time, and so subject to numerous stories about the irony of them not being old enough to drink in the venues they were ripping up.

Two years later, and on the other side of the so-called underage revolution, BYOP can finally be judged on their merit instead of their birthdays.

The youthful potency of their debut wasn't about age but energy; lunatic drumming, screechy guitars and lead singer Jemina Pearl's vocals, which veer, Karen O-style, from growls to screams to honeyed



sweetness at breakneck speed. Nonetheless, writing their new album, *Get Awkward* (released last week), meant starting over again, and with a rejigged line-up after BYOP founders Jake and Jamin Orrall left. So, with new drummer John Eatherly signed up and months of touring behind them, the group got down to it.

They've wisely stuck to the style that got them noticed, turning out 15 short, sharp shocks of infectious noise, albeit with a dash more melody thrown in this time.

Another UK tour gives audiences a chance to see them where they really excel: onstage, largely thanks to Pearl's entrancing presence – the sort that most artists, however old, couldn't muster in a lifetime. *Zofia Niemtus*
Tonight, Academy 3, UMSU, Oxford Road, Central Manchester, 7.30pm, £8.50. Tel: 275 2930. www.beyourownpet.net

GIG

The Draytones

Many bands look back to the 1960s for musical inspiration, but none more so than The Draytones, whose music is firmly rooted in the sounds made by the likes of Syd Barrett-era Pink Floyd and a certain beat combo from Liverpool. Thankfully, the band have written some tunes that stand up next to those they wish to emulate, in particular their new single, *Turn It Down*, which mixes Morse code and Merseybeat to terrific effect.

Like returning to a classic album, The Draytones remind you that sometimes it's foolish to try changing a winning formula.

Aaron Lavery

Tonight, The Deaf Institute, Grosvenor Street, Central Manchester, 8pm, £5. Tel: 832 1111. www.myspace.com/thedraytones



PHOTOGRAPHY REVIEW

Fathers, Brothers, Sons

★★★★★

Midway through Imperial War Museum North's new photography exhibition, *Fathers, Brothers, Sons*, there hangs an image of two male siblings, Farhad and Farhuddin Ba Deli, standing atop the roof of a battered building. One brother leans on a crutch, having lost his leg in a rocket attack, while behind them Kabul's Old City can be glimpsed, partially in ruins.

Viewed alone, the photograph stands as a document of Afghanistan's recent history. When placed alongside Seamus Murphy's accompanying pictures of the Ba Deli family (pictured), taken over a 13-year period, the image is



granted a haunting poignancy thanks to the insight we've been given into the events that preceded it.

Beginning with a 1994 family portrait of four sons and their elderly father, Murphy's exhibition chronicles the Ba Delis' lives as they endure the loss of two brothers and their father. No signs of

fighting are present in any of the 16 black and white photographs that make up *Fathers, Brothers, Sons*. But the sudden way in which family members disappear from portraits, and the accompanying text informing us of their demise, means that viewers cannot avoid facing up to the realities of their deaths.

Richard Smirke
Until Jul 6, Imperial War Museum North, Trafford Wharf Road, Trafford Park, daily 10am to 6pm, free. Tel: 836 4000. north.iwm.org.uk



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