

# Review

**MONSTROUS** Regiment. A good name for a feminist theatre group, guaranteed to raise a knowing smile in places where the works of John Knox are read and allusions to them cherished.

It could be an off-putting name, unfortunately, to anyone else; almost as off-putting as some of the publicity the group have circulated about their new show, "Time Gentlemen Please" (repeated at First Aid, Doncaster, tonight).

The show is described, unpromisingly, as "an honest and brutal account of how women feel", a contribution to "the growing and lively movement to improve the status of women." Visions of actresses sticking (phallic) pins into male wax-dolls, lobbing propaganda over the footlights as they go.

## Brilliant

"Time Gentlemen Please" is nothing so militant or so boring. It is a brilliant two-hour cabaret about sex, with jokes, songs and sketches following one another in smooth, satirical succession, and nothing as categorically black and white as the set and costumes suggest.

The six-strong company pull no punches. They challenge you to be offended by their explicit discussion of the inhibitions and injustices of sex, but so much of what they say rings uncomfortably true, and all of it is done with such style and inventiveness, that it is a delight from beginning to end.

That may be a bit of a drawback.

The show (originally scripted by Bryony Lavery) may sometimes be too beguilingly entertaining for its own didactic good, with points registering as a laugh and nothing more.

## Bias

But for all the entertainment, the underlying feminist bias is still there, with women shown taking a dominant role in relationships, and men worrying perpetually about their sexual prowess: a set-up in which the group's three actresses can give more biting, more telling performances than the blandly stereotyped men.

— Stephen McClarence.

DONCASTER  
EVENING  
POST

8 NOV 1978

# MONSTROUS REGIMENT

## Intention largely defeated

Monstrous Regiment, Time, Gentlemen, Please, University Theatre, Tuesday and Wednesday.

MONSTROUS Regiment is a fringe group whose intention is to spread the gospel of female emancipation. But on Tuesday evening at the University Theatre I felt that this intention was largely defeated.

The title of the show, which took the form of a cabaret, was called Time, Gentlemen, Please. It was time, we were to know, that the gentlemen stopped assuming that in matters of sex there was one code for themselves and another for the ladies.

Such was the show's theme, or rather excuse for two-and-a-half-hour of harping on sexual matters which eventually became extremely dispiriting.

What the company of six, three boys and three girls, was trying to put over was a picture of a new, liberated sexual morality. What they did in fact put over to me was an impression of sad, frustrated, muddled creatures.

For me the evening was summarised in a pastiche of Noel Coward's lyric, I've Been to a Marvellous Party. The original is not particularly witty and the version we heard on Tuesday, We've Been to a Marvellous Orgy, was very flat indeed. The orgy had not been marvellous, that was what came over.

However, the performers put over some pretty lame material with aplomb and four of them were evidently accomplished musicians. The set, a silver curtain, flanked by microphones and musical gear, was a nice one. The director was Susan Todd. **NICHOLAS BUTLER**

## First Night

# TIME FOR THE FUNNY SIDE OF SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

OK, so sexual relationships ARE deeply meaningful and terribly important.

But they are also belly-achingly funny sometimes, which we often forget.

Some of the funniest things I've ever heard on sex are wrapped up in the latest package from Monstrous Regiment in Time Gentlemen Please at Essex University.

The cast of three men and three women explore from both sides of the battle the roles played in sexual encounters of every possible kind.

The show is blue and bawdy, but presented in such a way that only the oversensitive could be offended by it.

I can't remember when I've enjoyed the theatre as much

before — or laughed so loudly.

I think the gentleman sitting in front of my friend would agree. Helpless with laughter at one point, he turned and buried his face into her knees.

In fact the whole audience was soon helpless with childish giggles at the references to alternative

words for sex and parts of the anatomy.

There is also a strong undercurrent of serious thought about relationships in the collection of monologues, sketches and songs, joined by a thread of first-rate jazz and reggae music, composed and played by the cast.

The lyrics were also excellent, especially from

Dianne Adderly, playing flute and bass guitar as well, but were in danger of being drowned sometimes by the over-amplified music.

Keith Morris on tenor saxophone and bass and Richard Attree on piano completed the very professional trio.

Chris Bowler and Mary McCusceve successfully took

on the normally male-dominated role of stand-up comics. Their costumes blended in well with the jazzy black and silver set and gave an overall cabaret show effect.

Writer Bryony Lavery, director Susan Todd and designer Stephanie Howard have put together, a thoroughly entertaining show.

The only other criticism I would make is its length. It lasts for over two hours and could be cut easily by about half-an-hour, which I understand Susan Todd intends to do during the rest of their current six week tour of the country.

Time Gentleman Please opened last night with the second and last performance tonight. **YVONNE HALL**

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## TimeOut

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### 'Time Gentleman Please'

Monstrous Regiment Cabaret. The latest from Monstrous Regiment is a cabaret, suavely staged and elegantly dressed, with astonishing versatility and sophistication in the music. It explores all too neglected aspects of love-making, inverting the usual anti-feminist functions of stand-up comedy, and debunking romantic and commercial mythologies. At least, that's what the show does at its best. At its worst and it spends a lot of time at its worst, it falls into all the whimsical traps of the thirties revues it aims to parody. It seems obsessed with middle-class manners, for example in a number about couples bickering at a dinner-party. And since we gay people are excluded altogether, I had little time for the whining of the company's heterosexual men ('Why weren't we taught women like us to be gentle?' etc.) Risking voyeurism in places, and with a sketch satirising organised feminism, this miscellany offers straight men too much consolation by half. (Jim Hiley.)

## Monstrous Regiment

... at the Aston University Centre for the Arts

Sadly there are always more good actors lurking about than worthy new dramatic works to challenge them. This is the tragedy of *Time Gentlemen Please*, optimistically billed as: "A truly offensive show—a Pandora's box of truthful invective."

It is indisputably a polished and professional performance by Monstrous Regiment. Timing (in sex, primarily) in what most of the play is about and the timing of all six actor/musicians is impeccable.

What a pity it is generally wasted on such uninspiring material. Perhaps the now-clichéd sexual themes would have been daringly original even five years ago, but we have heard it all before. Not that it cannot be pleasant to hear it again—as an indulgent first night audience indicated.

The sultry Mary McCusker is exceptionally gifted in the art of the meaningful delivery, making the most mundane line sound a gem. Christine Bowler successfully sustains the vapid sex-kitten air and Diane Adderley is equally accomplished on guitar, keyboard, flute and centre stage.

The men too have ample chance to shine with the "awkward stage" duet by Clive Russell and Keith Morris particularly effective. One imaginative bit is the "Can you imagine" monologue to which the divine Ms. M. does more than justice.

VICTORIA MCKEE

# Radical Theatre

"TIME GENTLEMEN, PLEASE" -  
MONSTROUS REGIMENT THEATRE GROUP

This is a cabaret about sex, though not of the grunt-and-groan Soho type, or of the more pretentious but equally exploitative "Oh Calcutta" type. It's about sex as we all experience it, as an area of immense uncertainty, worry and oppression, but also of occasional joy and humour. All the sketches relate in some way to real experience - of hiding your shame with a towel in the school-showers, or of being accused by your parents of becoming a harlot for wearing a pro-abortion badge or drinking coffee instead of tea! For the more adventurous, there's a scene where two bruised and exhausted sexual athletes mourn the demise of the missionary position!

The cabaret is consciously and consistently feminist, as you'd expect from a company of eight women and three men. As such it contains themes from their previous effort, "Floorshow", though this latest show goes a lot deeper and exchanges "Floorshow's" brashness for a more contemplative and moving approach. I was able to identify particularly strongly with the scene where one of the men described how, as he grew up, he'd been given an image of women which was in turn frightening and contemptible. In fact, the show succeeds because it makes public feelings of inadequacy and doubt which usually remain strictly private, even in these supposedly more sexually "liberated" times.

Monstrous Regiment's choice of the cabaret format is extremely interesting, largely because it makes their work much more accessible and popular, and allows them to avoid the demagogic, hectoring approach of most radical theatre.

By coming down off the soapbox and refusing to provide clear-cut answers to very complicated questions, they allow their audience to come to terms for themselves with the contradictions and dilemmas of everyday life. Naturally, it also makes for a much more entertaining show, which makes its political message much more effective.

If you believe, or still need convincing, that radical theatre can actually be fun and professionally performed, try and catch "Time, Gentlemen Please". I saw it at the Women's Festival in Nottingham, but it's touring the country and should be appearing in Leicester at some stage. By the way, in case you're wondering, the group get their name from a regiment of women that was once recruited to the British Army and was widely denounced as "monstrous".

ANDY PEARMAIN