

British Theatre Guide

It's Hot, It's Not

Devised by Mole Wetherell, Kevin Egan, Tim Ingram, Leen Dewilde & Alex Covel

Reckless Sleepers

Unicorn Theatre (Clare Theatre)

2 February to 10 March 2019

This is a 45-minute-long performance aimed at youngsters 2 to 5, though certainly not limited to that age group. A babe in arms next to me seemed captivated and accompanying adults were enjoying it too. It is subtitled *Weather the Weather* and though its inspiration may be meteorological, with specific elements of wind, rain and thunder, its appeal to young minds and its stimulus of young imaginations won't be limited to just weather.

This is a piece without dialogue and, though there are some snatches of songs that have words in them, they are part of the sound score, not sung by the actors who are a pair of young adults and one older "grandfather" figure.

These are three grown-ups who seem to behave like children. They try things out: balancing, moving in funny ways, wiggling and wriggling, if one does something, the others copy it. They open little doors to see what's behind them, or if they are behind them may pop their heads out—or even squeeze whole bodies through them.

They have an abstract environment of unadorned ply board, a platform with a rear panel full of those doors, a low ceiling on one side (from which things can tumble). At first, the platform sprouts tiny paper umbrellas like flowers that are picked up and collected into a bucket to start the show (they will reappear later).

The performers are Kevin Egan, who can sometimes seem to sink his head lower than his shoulders, Leen Dewilde, who makes sure there is plenty of eye-contact with the audience, and Mole Wetherell, Artistic Director of *Reckless Sleepers*, who makes a point of sometimes not being able to do things like balancing as easily as his younger colleagues can, which makes the audience especially like him.

The youngsters clearly enjoy seeing people experiencing the same problems that they have, whether balancing on an upturned bucket or walking against a strong wind. I think they also enjoy watching grown ups being a bit silly and of course they have a cruel sense of humour: when there is a routine rolling across the stage floor and "grandpa" rolls off the platform, they love it (especially the second time), likewise when Kevin disappears behind the screen and there is a big crash.

Grandpa goes off and comes back with a huge beach ball that Leen uses to knock the others off balance (though without doing real harm) and jokingly a smaller ball appears and then a really tiny one that turns out to be an apple.

Umbrellas represent rain (though with wind one gets blown inside-out) but there is no water from heaven (though there are apples) and a large trap door makes a real puddle possible, ready to be jumped in with a big splash.

There is the sound of the sea, a *Mary Poppins* umbrella moment, a buzzing of insects as it gets hot with some of them biting. Tree trunks are brought in to make a stark winter forest and ping-pong balls simulate heavy snowfall.

Perhaps the highlight is a sequence when, after there had already been a brief sequence of barking to introduce dogginess, a frenzy of action sees exhausted panting gradually turning everyone into canines, one even raising a hind leg.

This isn't a show for children who like to think themselves already sophisticated grown-ups, but it is cleverly matched to its target audience. It could be the start of a lifetime of theatregoing, but it doesn't set out to do that—just to stimulate kids and give them a good time.

[Howard Loxton](#)