

THE PRESS

Review: The Last Supper, Reckless Sleepers, De Grey Rooms Ballroom, York Theatre Royal 5:58pm Thursday 8th October 2015

IN the very hour that 14 million tuned in to watch Yorkshire's own Nadiya Hussain win The Great British Bake Off, a select 39 preferred to experience a different last supper in York.

The De Grey Rooms is equipped for wedding breakfasts, possibly in the same configuration of three tables that formed a U shape facing the top table.

There were differences, however. The "guests" were greeted by two men and one woman in bare feet; "staff" preparing meals were bare footed too, and the guests were invited to pick out a numbered piece of paper from a bucket that soon would take on greater significance. Each guest was led to a matching numbered seat and offered a glass of wine or water; all very civilised if a little mysterious, for this was to be a night when not everyone would be fed. Only 13 would be given a meal, and that meal would have a ticket number that corresponded with the execution number of a Death Row inmate, whose last meal request would be read out and served silver-service style to the guest with the matching numbers.

Interspersed with these 13 last suppers – ranging from a jar of dill pickles to a chocolate cake with seven candles to a wish for justice, equality and world peace – were the last words of 39 "famous and not so famous" characters.

These were read out and sometimes enacted by the Reckless Sleepers cast members Mole Wetherell, Orla Shine and Tim Ingram, who consumed those words in the form of rice paper, as well as taking bites from the green apples placed at intervals on their table. Part meal, part theatre, all performance piece, The Last Supper has been a morbidly fascinating cult international hit since 2002 with its food-for-thought content, gallows humour, impeccable table manners, grim reaper mischief and sense of finality.

All life is here; all death is here, from Eva Braun and her dog Blondie to Marilyn Monroe's desperate phone calls, wearing nothing but Chanel No 5; from John Lennon's "I've Been Shot" to Diana's "What happened" in Paris, the former accompanied by sound recordings of Lennon's earlier encounter with Mark Chapman, the latter with details of her last hotel meal. We learned of hunger striker Bobby Sands' last diary entry; Che Guevara's disputed finale; four increasingly fantastical versions of what Saddam Hussein may or may not have said; LSD enthusiast Timothy Leary's "Why not"; and Andy Warhol being declared dead, not once, but twice, 19 years apart.

Irreverence played its part, especially when running through Elvis Presley's daily food intake before his life went down the Gracelands pan. "Over ate and over rated," was Wetherell's damning verdict.

There were moments to reduce the room to silence, such as the last words of a fearful boy in Hiroshima; moments for laughter, such as Winston Churchill's "I am so bored with it all; moments to haunt you, such as the troubled Vincent Van Gogh's "I wish I could pass away like this; the sadness will last forever".

The show's structure was elegantly elliptical, everything tied together at its finale, which went from a burning Joan of Arc saying "Christ" to Jesus Christ's "Forgive them" on the cross. Did we eat the food, as it turned cold amid its competing aromas? Not everyone had the stomach for it, but the upbeat very last words went to Noel Coward: "Goodnight darlings".

Charles Hutchinson