

who believed that  
h would inevitably  
past, as we moved  
millennium, the  
political landscape of  
ury – with its high-  
often brutal religious  
ism – has come as a  
ock.  
alar unbelievers  
notice, though, is  
battle within all  
en fundamentalists,  
that unbelievers are  
ned, and liberals  
cept that there are  
owards God. It's  
that is explored in  
le in *The Christians*,  
merican playwright  
, a story of faith and  
large and wealthy  
regation, brought to  
by the Gate Theatre,

ay opens, a  
noir (Song Works of  
sways and sings on  
ple robes. Then the  
cast enter and take  
n front of the choir  
a celebration sermon  
guished Pastor Paul,  
ayed by William  
who has decided  
occasion of the  
ng off all its debts by  
to his loyal followers  
o hell, and that a  
represents as sure a  
ven as any profession

non that triggers an  
esponse, not only  
angry young deputy  
(an Adegbola),  
m the board of  
– represented by  
ambivalent David  
he Elder – from Lucy  
a young woman  
mber who feels  
nd used, and from  
a wife herself, who  
ly played by Jaye

most striking about  
and riveting 80  
drama, deftly  
Christopher Haydon,  
flects not only a vital  
hin the world of faith,  
wider questions of  
and belief.  
restles with the harsh  
groups so often seem  
ense of an "other", a  
damned enemy, in  
aintain their sense  
nity and to avoid  
disintegration that  
wrecks Pastor Paul's  
eaving his church  
to achieve anything

CMILLAN  
st. Today 9:15pm.  
Y BRITISH  
HOOD  
ICE DOME (VENUE 23)

# If you go down to the woods today...



While the axe may be a big surprise, the rest of *L'Enfant qui...* is understated and ethereal, and yet still accessible

**DANCE, PHYSICAL  
THEATRE AND CIRCUS  
L'ENFANT QUI...**  
INSTITUT FRANÇAIS D'ECOSSE  
(VENUE 134)  
★★★★

THERE'S a man swinging an axe around his head and, at the company's insistence, I'm sitting on the front row.

As he thwacks it into a tree stump, I'm thankful that it's not my head.

"It's not a narrative show," someone else explains at the start. But thankfully it's also not a show that's interested in physically harming today's audience. Despite initial

impressions, it's far too sensitive for that.

Set in a woodland clearing, it's an ethereal piece of character-based physical theatre, inspired by a tiny sculpture from Belgian artist Jephann de Villiers – an unusual artefact comprising a moon-like face on a stick.

As a charming child puppet wanders through fallen leaves, stealing phones from audience members' bags, a nymph-like creature somersaults through the trees, assisted by her two aides.

The mask and the stick are reimagined throughout as visual motifs – whether it's the long branches that form the

forest, white faces that cover orange glowing lights, or wood shavings that tumble from the boy's soon-to-be crumbling body.

It's an emotional and elusive piece that builds to a dramatic confrontation between the boy and the woman – one that, it becomes clear (upon reading the production notes), represents the young de Villiers battling with childhood illness.

While the story is relaxed in its obliqueness, the atmosphere is exceptional and the use of circus skills more commonly associated with upbeat big top shows are turned into something far more haunting,

emotionally involving and creatively rich.

Movingly performed by puppeteer Morgane Aimerie Robin and acrobats Caroline Le Roy, Adrià Cordoncillo and Michaël Pallandre, to the sound of Florence Sauveur's melancholic cello, it's a defiantly artistic piece that manages the rare achievement of also being pretty accessible.

In the end, it doesn't really matter what it's about.

Its lingering mood and understated celebration of nature and childlike curiosity are what stay with you.

**SALLY STOTT**  
Until 29 August. Today 6:30pm.

right out of a Ladybird book and speaking in grammatically perfect sentences.

But one Friday in a long, hot summer, the veneer cracks. What is father hiding? Why is mother on medication? And what secrets are lurking in the old house in the woods? When a child goes missing, it doesn't take long for the polite, prosperous world of the Baby Boomer generation to fracture and fall apart.

Young theatre company Pelican Briefs go to a lot of trouble to create an authentic period piece through set and costumes, but it feels like the 1960s filtered through modern

to say to us today and why it interests theatre-makers who were not born in the 1960s.

**SUSAN MANSFIELD**  
Until 30 August. Today 11:45am.

**THEATRE  
THE BENCH**  
THESPACE @ SURGEONS HALL  
(VENUE 53)  
★★

A TRIO of vaguely sketched and even more vaguely connected stories unfold on or, in one case, near a park bench – a young couple work through their issues in the present day, a random meeting in the 1950s leads to a sweet, old-school courtship and a tale

on Lambrini, writes the show's own poster pull quote: "It's not exactly Chekhov, is it?"  
**FIONA SHEPHERD**  
Until 20 August. Today 4:20pm.

**THEATRE  
THE 229 IS NEVER ON  
TIME**  
THESPACE @SURGEONS HALL  
(VENUE 53)  
★★

THE elegantly choreographed moves between scenes and the plot which turns in on itself several times suggest that this young company has ambition.

But this tale of a man's anger, violence and confused mental

**THEATRE  
BORIS: WORLD KING**  
PLEASANCE COURTYARD  
(VENUE 33)  
★★

IN TERMS of satirical message, this direct attack on the bogus cult of Boris Johnson is highly commendable.

I couldn't agree more with its scathing dissection of Johnson as an unprincipled, philandering, duplicitous opportunist who uses the supposed charm and humour of his bumbling toff act to get whatever he wants.

Unfortunately, for a comic play it barely raises a smile. Actor/impressionist David