

Witty cabaret as the planet burns

Theatre

Futurology: A Global Revue SECC, Glasgow

★★★★★

It is the 14th UN Conference of the Future, and the subject is climate change. The delegates have gathered at their Perspex desks to hammer out a Kyoto-style agreement, but they seem more interested in national rivalries, free-market enterprise and post-conference sex than saving the planet. Only the poor woman from a sinking Pacific island 465 miles south of Fiji has any sense of urgency, and she is as powerless as the rioting mob on the streets outside the meeting room.

What turns a white-collar satire into extraordinary theatre is the repeated segues into flamboyant cabaret in Graham Eatough's production for Suspect Culture and the National Theatre of Scotland. When the delegates aren't pontificating behind laptops, they are stepping out into tangos, torch songs or gymnastic routines. When they can't settle on a joint manifesto, they break into a rousing sing-along worthy of Chitty Chitty Bang Bang.

The procrastination continues while Rome burns, the company presenting a heightened vision of a species running headless into the unknown, uncertain whether to celebrate humanity's gift for artistry and spectacle, or to put an end to mankind for fear of a frightening future. The apocalyptic conclusion shows our egotistical, vainglorious and confused actions for the pathetic gestures they are, though the play's political ambivalence adds more to our eco-confusion than it clarifies.

But even if it has more of an air of topicality than the rush of real political passion, *Futurology: A Global Revue* is thoroughly entertaining. Nick Powell's cabaret show-band score is first-rate, as are the arresting performances from the international cast. There are notable turns from Angela de Castro as the hapless islander with a store cupboard of props in her cleavage, Morag Stark as a

chillingly blank chairwoman coolly announcing that "there's an explosive device under seat 62", and the double-act of Callum Cuthbertson and Sharon Smith bringing smutty ventriloquist innuendo to the dry language of diplomacy.

The script, devised by David Greig and Dan Rebellato, is witty more often than it is laugh-out-loud funny, which makes Grant Smeaton's hedonistic mayor-cum-comedian a touch less outrageous than he could be. Navigating between silly gags and political reality gives the play an uncertain tone somewhere between satire and surrealism that doesn't always come off. But for its boldness, originality and sheer confidence, *Futurology* is a present-day delight.

Mark Fisher

Until April 14. Box office: 0870 040 4000. Then touring.



Bokl, original, confident... Futurology Photograph: Manda Macleod

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