

Sussex Playwrights Reviews: Sheep Love to Die by Phil Tong

‘I feel like we’ve been shifted sideways, here but not ...’

In a split second, something happened, with repercussions over many years. With shades of Beckett or Pinter, the play looks at why – reasons, or excuses?

Two ladies, sisters, are trapped in burned out armchairs, in stark grey light and ghostly makeup. Something dreadful’s happened – but what? Memories are elusive, sleeting in via sudden bursts of sound.

Heather Alexander [Constance] and Lisa Harmer [Evelynn] as the ladies snip and bicker, poke and react, in Tong’s signature rapid-fire back and forth short sentence dialogue, groping to capture wistful memories of better times before they’re lost for good. There’s cast iron fragility and a lifetime of guilt, here.

The set’s a series of wheeled wooden frames in a black box runway space, completely see through, yet still claustrophobic, the women trapped between four shifting insubstantial walls.

Characters push and reconfigure them, thumping them on the ground, stepping through and between them, chopped timelines of past, present and future all merge and swirl.

There’s an assured soundscape and lighting effects, some serious tech in the little space.

Cydney Edwards’s Janey, a young woman just wanting, finally, her break, her step up into a better world, pins all her hopes on dodgy ground. Jordan Southwell’s Steve is an

edgy lost boy, seeming one thing, drawn inevitably down into something else.

Nathan Gardner as Daz reveals a victim haunted by family tragedy, expressed in barnstorming rap bravado that will set him on a ruinous path.

And John McCormack's lyrical gangster Kavanagh is seasoned, mysterious and wise.

Different times and places happen in the same space until they all converge, leading to what must happen, to what has already happened.

Although sometimes it's a little uncertain what's happened when and where, John Berry directs an assured cast of well drawn characters each with their own distinctive voice.

Philippa Hammond