

BIG BROTHER BLITZKRIEG
JANUARY AND JUNE 2016 AT THE KING'S HEAD
THEATRE
WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY MAX ELTON AND HEW
ROUS-EYRE

ABOUT THE PLAY

Big Brother Blitzkrieg follows Adolf Hitler after he wakes to find himself in the Big Brother House. Out of his depth and surrounded by the kind of individuals he believes belong in a concentration camp, Hitler attempts to navigate his way through the competition with one objective. To make Big Brother Great Again!

Exploring the themes of entertainment politics and celebrity worship, Bitter Pill attempt to draw parallels between the political upheavals of 2016 and how we interact with reality television.

PRESS RESPONSES

A Younger Theatre
Lydia Lakemoore

What if Adolf Hitler were a contestant in the Big Brother house? What if his outspoken manner and aggressive insanity made him popular with the viewing public? What if he won? These are the ideas that are explored in *Big Brother Blitzkrieg*. After his suicide attempt fails Adolf awakens to find himself in a colorfully decorated house, complete with garden and yes, the diary room.

George Smith accurately voiced Big Brother throughout, calling characters to the diary room for the classic, trivial style question and answer sessions that have become a custom on the show since its launch. Jenny Johns played Lucy, one of the contestants. Her performance was a virtually like for like impersonation of previous Big Brother contestant and Apprentice finalist Kate Hopkins; known for her controversial comments and superior self-declaration. Her voice and mannerisms were impressively accurate and that matched with the fact that character was so foul-mouthed and stuck up meant that the whole thing worked rather splendidly and she was very entertaining.

Other characters resembled different outrageously extreme stereotypes that we often see on reality TV programs. Neil Summerville played Felix, a gay man, who waltzed around the house in tiny pink hot pants. Although playing a heightened camp character he was believable in his role finding depth in what could easily have been played as very trivial. The conviction with which each actor played his part was the making of this play. It could have fallen into a farcical and silly show but the skill of the actors enabled us to grasp a concept deeper than a play about reality TV.

We were able to focus realistically on the concept of people in the twenty first century liking Adolf Hitler's reality persona. Hitler was played by Stephen Chance. He was exemplary in this role. This depiction of Hitler as a man unsure, out of his comfort zone yet still underscored with wickedness, madness and contempt was captivating. He was gloriously manipulative and cleverly characterized. This is a talented and amazingly detailed actor who I would love to watch in future roles. We watched Chance manipulate the other characters on stage as he successfully delivered a truthful and realistic portrayal of a man so despised through history, and oddly made a watching audience acknowledge him as a man.

This was a very well acted play throughout. Hannah Douglas, Kit Loyd and Tracey Ann Wood played other contestants within the house. Each of them in their own right stood out for managing to find real truth inside their stereotypical character shells.

When I first read the synopsis I was unsure what to expect, Adolf Hitler in the Big Brother house? I thought where is the playwright going with this. I find plays like this, with such a scandalous concept, can easily go one of two ways. Either it's done a bit silly and any deeper meaning is lost or it is a huge success.

This play worked magnificently because not one actor on stage held back; there was no apologetic acting regardless of the fact that each character was someone essentially unlikable. By the end I felt quite horrified because I had empathized with someone portraying Adolf Hitler. I felt as though I had alarmingly understood him, even though I had, of course not, liked him, and that is perhaps what the writer and director had wanted us to feel. The concept of this play is superb and I am so pleased it was performed to such a high standard so that a deeper subtext came through with so much impact.

British Theatre Guide

Howard Loxton

It is 1909, and 20-year-old Adolf Hitler has just been turned down (again) by art school—and not told to apply again. It's all too much. He tries to shoot himself and perhaps he does succeed for, when he regains his senses, he finds himself in a kind of Limbo: television's Big Brother House.

This is both a sendup of the *Big Brother* "reality" show and a comic look at the pernicious way in which Herr Hitler came to power. It is not really a satire on so-called "celebrity" nor on the rise of fascism and the Third Reich, more a light-hearted bit of fun, though it does turn darker as it progresses.

The first housemate the disoriented dictator encounters is Neil Summerville's chubby, ebullient and ultra camp Felix in a cheetah-face t-shirt who seems to be some kind of celebrity. Then there are Charlie (Hannah Douglas) as self-described Femi-Gender (adamant that Lesbian is the wrong nomenclature) and

would-be rapper M-Cat (Kit Lloyd) who's non-too-clever but full of enthusiasms and soon Adolf's yes-man.

Hitler is rather taken by posh PR lady Lucy (Jenny Johns), recognising that he can learn from her in controlling the masses. Remaining housemate is Rachel (Tracey Ann Wood), a housewife and mother who has left a weeks-old baby behind to come into the Big Brother House; she's the practical person who find herself housekeeping for the others—and, by the way, she is Jewish.

Stephen Chance plays Hitler and he dominates from the start with an explosive portrayal of pent-up prejudice and perplexedness, a control freak with a conviction of his absolute rightness and a voice with an edge and an accent that could cut through concrete. He presents a caricature that is hysterically funny but the play and his performance are built on just a single idea, an extended gag that can't be sustained for a whole show.

Fortunately, the writers know this and just when it could run out of steam Hitler's refusal to accept Big Brother's orders sees him suddenly evicted—and then brought back, when his influence on the others becomes more serious as he gets them to turn against Rachel.

Big Brother gets the housemates playing a game called War Zone but it doesn't attempt to parody events in WW II, nor does the play parallel real events in Hitler's progress—or begin to match the actual awfulness of the “real” Big Brother's excesses.

There is ***Fear and Misery of the Third Reich*** presenting Brecht's warning about Hitler on the other side of the Thames but, while *Big Brother Blitzkrieg* does reflect the insidious way in which attitudes can be altered, its object is laughter and Chance and Summerville know how to keep it coming.

The Upcoming Edward Till

★★★★

The play has a scrappy charm to it, with a minimalist set and rather broad comedy, whilst making good use of both the format of Big Brother and Hitler's personal timeline. What is most surprising about *Blitzkrieg*, which could have ended up being a one-joke sketch, is how furiously it sustains its running time, without an interval. It has a gripping narrative that many larger plays struggle to match.

The impressive cast no doubt play a part in this. Hitler's housemates run the gamut from irritating to obnoxious, from the gay and uninhibited Felix (Neil Summerville), the dim-witted M-Cat (Kit Lloyd), the snobbish PR rep Lucy (Jenny Johns), the Jewish mum of three Rachel (Tracy Ann Wood) and the easily offended uber-feminist Charlie (a beguiling Hannah Douglas). These characters are inherently stereotypical and function more as archetypes than anything else,

yet some actors are required to handle subtle character transformations too, as befits the charismatic sway of their new housemate.

Blitzkrieg's success is due in large part to actor Stephen Chance's masterful navigation of these tricky waters, turning Hitler into both an absurd buffoon and a sinister manipulator of the susceptible, shallow personalities around him. This Hitler is thin-skinned, petulant and easily angered, which often yields much laughter, yet Chance never neglects to show his coiled, prowling movements, suggesting a sinister and fiendish glimmer behind the screaming bravado.

The play's tone is conducted through the Hitler character as his influence begins to exert itself, giving a decidedly bitter taste to the comedy. Indeed, the creators have acknowledged the play's polemical attacks against "anti" politics and celebrity worship, given the popularity of a certain reality star running for political office across the pond.

Whether or not this is a story that contributes significantly to 21st century political thought, there is great talent and promise to be found here. *Big Brother Blitzkrieg* is consistently funny and increasingly tense during its 75-minute run time and it certainly punches above its weight.