

Forkbeard Fantasy
Invisible Bonfires
Toynbee Studios, London
29 November 2007

Reviewed by Beccy Smith

Forkbeard Fantasy's new show, *Invisible Bonfires*, tackles serious ideas, albeit refracted through the lens of their customary deranged spectacles. In this case the spectacles are actual, with 3D glasses handed out as we entered the auditorium allowing us later to take advantage of the distinctly 1980s floor show: a journey through outer space complete with planets and asteroids whizzing around us. This wasn't the production's only spectacular element: live music from the supremely strange Lotus Pedals, who remained on stage throughout the show; the Barry White-toned, shadowy figure of Pan who loomed centre stage; a real-scale marionette-and-animatronic horse, whose lifelike presence more than rivalled that achieved by other shows whose budget far exceeded theirs.

The frame is a lo-tech road show, whose roguish hosts, The Brittonioni Brothers, are a pair of raffish cads out to turn a quick buck from the global trend in eco-consciousness by taking advantage of the naivety (and budget) of characters like local borough Climate Champion Paschale Pasquale. As their roadshow descends into chaos – with power cuts, audience intervention, explosions, and the arrival of characters from various dimensions – the Lotus Pedals' big numbers and underscoring provide a touch of class and continuity, although at times the contrast in tone of their presence can feel jarring. This is not, of course, a show reliant on the classical principles of theatre: abrupt changes of direction are executed by their own barmy logic ('Look! What's this enormous hole in the floor?') and characters such as a Patio Heater salesman, the Carbon Weevils (responsible for the unkind disturbance of many a slumbering nest of carbon) and Mammon all come and go in animation, cartoon and all manner of three-dimensional figure, as the ideas that flow throughout the show dictate. Indeed, this is performance that is bursting at the seams as a meta-theatrical cabaret, stuffed with visual, prop and puppet trickery that displays a childish delight in invention. Penny Saunder's puppets are profligate

and seeming to revel in the heterogeneity of our world and its ideas. She provides too, the show's most thoughtful moments in the tabletop and marionette figures of the mysterious white horse, which asserts itself with quiet luminosity through the chaos.

There remains, in this idiosyncratic history, a genuine creative response to many of the ideas around climate change and the ecology of our changing world, all the more appealing because of its madcap context. Shambolic, bold and beautiful – this show won't appeal to everyone, but if you can abandon yourself to its world, it offers truly unique rewards.