

## **Hancock and Co – One man, Many Voices**

**Review by Tom Dommett - Editor of The Missing Page, The Magazine of the Tony Hancock Appreciation Society.**

This was the debut of James Hurn's new show – one classic Galton and Simpson episode and two episodes written by James himself. The Mission Theatre in Bath is a friendly venue, and the audience of around 70 was enthusiastic.

First up was 'The Metal Detector' - The script was brilliant, the performance spot on, it was like listening to a newly unearthed Hancock's Half Hour recording from 1956.

Without giving too much away, Hancock has bought a metal detector, Sid is knee deep in crime, Bill is dim-witted Laurel to Hancock's Hardy and Hattie as Grizelda is given plenty of good lines. Kenneth Williams gets a chance to do all his usual voices, from the old man to snide. Hugh Lloyd works in the antiques shop that Hancock takes the treasures he has discovered with his mental detector to. Hugh casually mentions his contact in Oil Drum Lane, a certain Albert. It is a nice touch and although some might note, Hugh Lloyd didn't appear in any radio episodes, there was no reason why he couldn't have.

It is all very deftly done, and although plenty of bases are touched, nothing is shoehorned in, it has the natural flow of a Galton and Simpson script. The audience laughter was no less for this episode than the original one that followed. One has to take your hat off to James Hurn, not only has he written in the style of the great Galton and Simpson, but with the laughs too.

Next up was 'The Threatening Letters', one of the best HHH episodes. I was struck by just how many visual images are created by this great script, which only has 5 cast members.

Like most impressionists, James's impersonations have a physical aspect. He doesn't just switch voices, but expression, demeanour and stance.

The stage is sparse, a hat stand with a coat, Homburg and flat cap (none of which are used). A chair, a desk with a phone on it (used to talk to the Police

Station) and a microphone in a stand to one side, this is after all, the recreation of a radio show, not a stage production. There are occasional sound effects and linking music

After an interval, there was the third episode – ‘Hancock at Halloween’. James has already put a version of this on you-tube where it has been well received. Performed in front of an audience it was even better. Perhaps its having the audience reaction, perhaps imperceptible shifts in timing, it really came to life. Again, this new material fitted seamlessly in to the world of Hancock’s Half Hour. As the show ended, the audience were shouting for more. From behind the curtain, Kenneth Williams could be heard shouting, there is no more.

To me, no praise is too high for James Hurn. Imitating Sid James has defeated the best of impressionists. As others have noted, his Sid James voice is fantastic. There may be actors would do ‘essences’ as they can’t do impressions and impressionists who can do a few lines of catchphrases but can’t act, James Hurn on the other hand can both act and do fantastic impressions. He is protean in shifting between characters. His technical skill is astounding. In lesser hands switching from Tony to Hattie to Sid in swift succession might slow delivery but James has it down to a fine art. He is hugely talented and clearly the Hancock and Co is a labour of love.

If anyone is out there wondering; does it work, one man doing the whole cast? Are the new scripts up to scratch? Is it like the real thing? The answers are; yes, yes and yes.

Go and see him while you can. James Hurn – as recommended by the Tony Hancock Appreciation Society.