

Reviews

St George and the Dragon

★★★★★

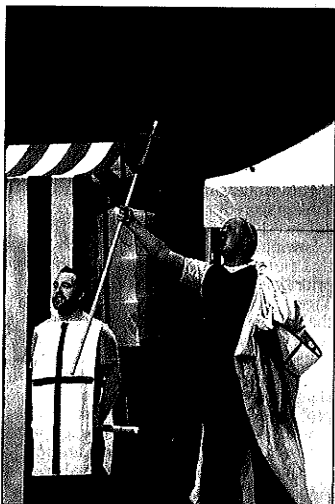
Lyric Hammersmith O-WE

Depending on who you read St George was either a dragon-slayer or a Crusader legend or a Coventry lad raised by faeries. Faced with so many sources, Beggarsbelief have taken a big breath and decided to use them all.

The way they approach the resultant story will be familiar to fans of their pantos at BAC, also written by Carl Heap and Tom Morris. Typically, a group of amateur mummers with a dazzling range of performance skills 'improvise' the tale, investing every moment with a joyfully feigned spontaneity.

They do it with ingenuity. The market stallers who tell this story make chain-mail from grey hoodies and battlements from awnings. George, a feral savant played with endearing openness by Michael Cox, quests to find a dragon, but learns that the beast is merely a symbol for those we want to hate. The actors deliver flamboyant performances, and are keen to keep the kids involved and happy. All the same, it's irresistible and right to say that St George and the Dragon drags on.

The narrative's not as nippy as it might be and there's a lot of moralising going on. In particular, the satire on medieval Christianity is heavy-handed and seems pointless – the Pardoner threat ain't what it used to be. Still, there remain moments to cherish: a shadow-play of the death of St Margaret is lovely; and there are flashes of wicked Dahl-ian humour. One such sees a chosen child sent off stage to be eaten. He returns through the stalls entrance – grinning like a cream-fed cat. *Kieron Quirke*



Cross to bear Brian Lonsdale, Ian Summers