



## **THEATRE PREVIEW**

### **A timely revival for Dario Fo's recession satire *Can't Pay? Won't Pay!***

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After glowing appraisals of its last two productions - a 1930s Berlin reworking of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and Nick Hornby's *NippleJesus* - Roughhouse Theatre's remit of mixing up classic, rarely-performed and new plays seems to be paying handsome dividends. Given the economic climate, its current production of Dario Fo's radical comedy about the fallout of recession seems remarkably apt. 'Can't Pay? Won't Pay!' is probably more relevant now than when it was written 35 years ago,' says artistic director Shane Morgan. 'Christmas has just happened, January's rubbish and pretty much everyone's down in the dumps. I just want people to go away with smiles on their faces in the bleak midwinter.'

The play centres on a riot at a local supermarket where, with the cost of living and inflation going through the roof, a gang of women revolt by devising a radical 'pay-what-you-can' scheme. 'Because people can't afford to pay for goods, they don't buy anything and take it all for themselves,' explains Morgan. 'Then the police - Dario Fo's main figures of fun swarm in. The women are strong vocal characters who stand up for themselves, but the play is generally about the public throwing down arms and saying: "We're not standing for this any more."' As well as updating Fo's incisive satire with Bristolian references, Morgan's adaptation hunkers down on the political and social shift of recent years. 'The 1980s translation that we're using became a little didactic in places. We've scaled it down, because the social framework has changed quite dramatically. We're really aiming it at those people who voted for New Labour in 1997, and have seen the change from hope to the situation we're in now.'

Despite the portentous theme, Fo's narrative is flecked with humour, and Morgan and the cast have clearly enjoyed developing the Italian dramatist's characters. 'There's a great opening routine with Antonia where she describes the riot at the supermarket,' he says. 'A lot of the characters that she plays in retelling the story are very heavily steeped in that Commedia dell'Arte tradition.'

*Can't Pay? Won't Pay!* is the third Fo production Morgan has directed (following *Accidental Death Of An Anarchist* and *Abducting Diana*) and, unsurprisingly, he declares himself a huge devotee. 'Dario Fo is one of the greatest living satirists. He really understands society, and how we fit into a big picture that ultimately we have very little control over. This play is almost the general public scoring a point back for themselves.'

*VELIMIR ILIC*