

Communicating Doors

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A complaint I hear from friends who do not enjoy theatre is that it is limited. It inhabits a small world, while film can take you anywhere.

In the round, pros arch, thrust: it doesn't matter the shape of the stage, there is a limit to the number of places you can take an audience.

Not so, say I, and this is exhibit A. Alan Ayckbourn's 16-year-old play *Communicating Doors* gets a welcome outing this summer at Stephen Joseph, and it is good to see the playwright's early experiments when he first began to tinker with time and space.

What an imagination Ayckbourn has. Inconsequential stories of the worries of the middle classes? Not a bit of it – this sci-fi thriller is incredible in that it displays just how creative this playwright is when it comes to the confines of the stage.

Shakespeare asked his audience to make leaps and pretend that a stage became a French battlefield. Ayckbourn lets his audience off the hook by doing all the hard work for them.

Communicating Doors is set in an ordinary looking hotel room, set in the distant future. A dominatrix prostitute arrives to entertain a very elderly gentleman, and all seems a little strange and seedy – and then things turn very weird.

The elderly man, Reece, is cared for by the incredibly sinister Julian. When he leaves and Reece confesses to the prostitute, Poopay, terrible crimes, she fears for her life.

Escaping into a cupboard, we watch as it revolves and she steps back out into the same hotel room – 20 years previously. The cupboard is a time machine, which allows Lisa Goddard's Ruella to travel from 1994 to warn Poopay of the dangers in the future.

So begins a journey through time, Poopay trying to prevent murders that happened in the past in the same hotel room where she hopes, in the present, to escape a similar fate.

The idea of an on-stage time machine is audacious, but it is in the dying moments of the play, when you will surely feel a lump in the throat, that you realise that as much as Poopay has taken a journey through time – we have been on a journey with her of a more emotional kind.

As Julian, Kim Wall makes the flesh creep whenever he is on stage and Laura Doddington's return to Scarborough is very welcome – she is an engaging actor with whom to share the journey.