

Review: Drop the Dead Donkey: The Reawakening!

Andy Hamilton and Guy Jenkin
Hat Trick and Simon Friend Entertainment
Everyman Theatre, Cheltenham
5–8 June 2024



Photo credit: Manuel Harlan

It's hard to believe that it's really been 26 years since *Drop the Dead Donkey* left our screens—the award-winning satirical series that sailed so much closer to truth than satire than we'd have dared imagine back then. Fast forward to 2024 and the Globelink News team are back, as brilliant as ever in the reimagining—*The Reawakening*—this time for the stage.

Starring original cast members Stephen Tompkinson, Neil Pearson, Susannah Doyle, Robert Duncan, Ingrid Lacey, Jeff Rawle and Victoria Wicks, with a loving nod to the late Haydn Gwynne and David Swift, our return visit to these characters is like slipping back into a comfortable pair of shoes. If those shoes came with a serious dose of satire.

The gang reconvene courtesy of Gus (the wonderful Robert Duncan) who's pulled together his crack team for the launch of 'Truth News' which, for legal reasons, obviously bears no resemblance whatsoever to GB News. They're all here—from the frankly terrifying Joy (Susannah Doyle), to the ever loveable but hapless George (Jeff Rawle), whose troubled relationship with Sonia, the voice-activated coffee machine, is a constant cause for concern.

My nineties crush Neil Pearson was there as womaniser Dave, who has (almost) turned over a new leaf while roving reporter and now wheelchair user Damien (TV royalty Stephen Tompkinson) is up to his old tricks. We also see Dimples the bear make a nostalgic return to frontline news reporting. Meanwhile, the ever-pompous Sally Smedley (Victoria Wicks) is

determined to make her mark away from her twilight slot at Radio Scunthorpe, and producer Helen (Ingrid Lacey) is in it for the journalistic kudos (“but also the money’s really good!”).

A couple of new characters join the original team—scheming Mairead, played by Julia Hills, who I remember fondly from BBC’s *2 Point 4 Children*—and newcomer Kerena Jagpal as the easily shaken Rita, who strongly suspect’s she’s simply Gus’s ‘diversity hire’. Such is the brilliance of Andy Hamilton and Guy Jenkin’s writing, this lands exactly as it should—the show never veers into remonstrating with ‘wokeness’; it just gently sends it up alongside everything—and everybody—else.

I’d hoped that the show would include the topical news references that made it so deliciously hilarious back in the day—and there they were in abundance. With election fever in full swing, nobody was spared from the acerbic wit, from our current government to the opposition. There was even a gentle swipe at Gloucester for the Cheltenham audience, which didn’t quite hit the mark it intended, I suspect.

My particular highlight was the segment involving actual Sir Trevor McDonald (no spoilers), and much of the show hung on more farce than I recall from the original series—but this translation into more physical comedy very much worked to the show’s advantage.

The tour continues on to Canterbury, concluding in Richmond on 22 June.

[Theatre review: Drop the Dead Donkey: The Reawakening! at Everyman Theatre, Cheltenham \(britishtheatreguide.info\)](http://britishtheatreguide.info)