

STAGE

Sign of the Times ★★☆☆☆

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Modern theatre can have a lot of glitzy embellishments: spectacular lighting displays, moving sets, moments of dazzling audio-visual enhancement, explosions, dry ice, trap doors and all sorts of slick tricks which can wow an audience. But the true test of a play is when it can hold a full theatre spellbound with just the power of the writing and the performances of the actors.

Tim Firth's *Sign of the Times* is just such a show. It's a simply staged two-hander which introduces us to two very believable people who are both at a crossroads in life.

Firth's comic drama is a timely look at employment from the perspective of a young work experience lad, Alan, and the experienced 50-year-old manager, Frank, who discovers that the world and his firm have moved on without him.

The touching drama explores the relationship between the two and director Karen Simpson firmly resists the temptation to allow the characters to wallow in self-pity and instead seeks out the truth and the comedy to be found in life and unrealised dreams.

Robert Gill as Frank and Thomas Pickles as Alan seize the opportunity to bring to life a pair of quirky individuals that avoid the pitfalls of caricature.

The set by Lucy Sierra is a simple double-sided design of an upper-storey office, showing the exterior in the first half and then reversed to show the inside, five years later, in the second.

A beautifully staged show about the modern workplace.

Verdict: A touching and witty look at life, reality and unfulfilled dreams in the modern workplace

Production information

Theatre Royal, Bury St Edmunds, January 27-31, then touring until February 28, PN January 27

Author: Tim Firth

Director: Karen Simpson

Design: Lucy Sierra (set), Ziggy Jacobs (lighting), Jon Nicholls (sound/composer)

Technical: James MacKenzie (production manager), Sky Barnes (deputy stage manager), Rhys Chamberlain (assistant stage manager) Heidi McEvoy-Swift (costume supervisor)

Cast: Robert Gill, Thomas Pickles

Running time: 2hrs 10mins