

Shop Front Theatre

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Shop Front Theatre: honest, personal, brave and inclusive

I recall at the commissioning stage for *CAR*, back in 1999, Chris telling me 'I've got something to say on stage, you'll like it' in characteristic O'Connell muted code. Little did I know that *CAR* was just the start of a trilogy which would garner a clutch of Fringe First awards and which in turn would lead to a great renaissance of new writing from a very Coventry perspective; local and global and as close the 'street experience' as any theatre could imagine.

When Theatre Absolute actually realised the Shop Front Theatre in 2009 it felt to me at the time as the most perfect and indeed timely response to the recession brought on by criminally behaved bankers! Honest, personal, brave and inclusive. I've loved it for over ten years!

The Shop Front Festival was a chance to platform all that Shop Front Theatre stood for in Coventry and to support the city's advance programme for City of Culture 2021. I'm not sure Theatre Absolute wanted or needed the exposure of a Festival but they saw the reasoning behind it and produced a challenging and radical supporting programme. Shop Front Theatre was surely one of the radical elements that led the judges to make the City of Culture award to Coventry.

The extraordinary sequence of *Are We Where We Are* and *Humanistan*, giving voice to our City at critical moments, collaboratively and with open arms has been extraordinary. As with *Fishy Moores*, Shop Front Theatre will cease to exist but remain firmly fixed in the city's memory. Long live Theatre Absolute and its radical pioneering spirit!

Alan Rivett