**Petula Review:** Krystal S Lowe

On Tuesday, the 5th of April I entered the foyer of the Riverfront Theatre eager to see Petula. Written by Fabrice Melquiot, directed and conceptualised by Mathlide Lopez, and translated and adapted by Daf James. I have always disliked reviewers who spend loads of time detailing the plot so I’ll just say – Petula is about a young person named Pwdin (pronounced like Puddin’) who has a really wild home-life and a missing cousin named Petula. Pwdin gets thrown into space on a quest to find his cousin. For more, read the programme.

As I walked into the auditorium for the performance, the stage was lit with Pwdin, played by Dewi Wykes, casually sitting. There were three television screens on stage – two on the left and one on the right. These screens were used to show captions throughout the entirety of the show.

As the performance began - with Pwdin shouting, ‘Ga i ddechrau?’ (Can I start?) to the technicians at the sound desk at the back of the room - the house lights remained on. Slowly, as Wykes began his first monologue, and we are introduced to each character, the lights dimmed. It was as if we were being ushered gently into this absurd world – I really enjoyed that detail. Wykes was charming in every way including how his fingers softly danced as he delivered his text.

The languages were brilliantly stitched together – seamlessly flowing from one to another with the performers adapting their accents and intonation for each language mid-sentence. This feat made for an intricate and captivating aural experience. The screens with subtitles were incredibly helpful for those of us who do not speak English, Welsh, and French. However, I quickly understood the exhaustion of those who routinely watch theatre with subtitles (or BSL interpreters) placed at the side of stage. I’m looking forward to the day when someone (who is good with technology) creates a subtitle bar that can run along the bottom of the stage so that the viewer can simultaneously read the subtitles and watch the show. However, my neck workout was worth it because James’ adaption and translation of the text was relevant and sensitive to the culture in which this version of Petula was set.

After the wild raw duck eating and the loss and re-attaching of teeth; Kizzy Crawford, who I became a fan of through her musical talents, made a refreshing entrance. There is a grace and gentleness about her that draws an audience closer and together with Wykes offered an innocence and sense of calm to the work.

As this performance ended, I was left slightly speechless – only able to utter one word, ‘strange’. You don’t know me, but that’s a good thing. Petula was strange and absurd and exactly what’s needed to jolt us out of the mundane monotony of everyday life.