



12 August 2008

## Theatre review: In Conflict

at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

by Joyce McMillan



(four star review)

ON BOTH sides of the Atlantic, the escalators of social mobility have slowed to a snail's pace over the last two decades. We no longer have many young working-class playwrights emerging, to dramatise life as they see it; which is perhaps why verbatim drama has become so important, as a way of giving a voice to millions of people whose experience might otherwise remain largely unheard – not least on the subject of war and peace and of how it feels to be an ordinary soldier in these times.

Temple Theater of Philadelphia's *In Conflict*, at the Assembly Rooms, is a show that occupies precisely the same territory as the National Theatre of Scotland's *Black Watch*, and is a blood brother of British shows like *Deep Cut* and *Motherland*, playing on this year's Fringe.

Based on a powerful book of interviews by New York journalist Yvonne Latty, this compelling 100-minute show offers brief but utterly vivid and convincing sketches of 17 US servicemen and women with experience of the war in Iraq. The huge range of characters they represent – from Russian migrant in New York to Native American in Arizona – comes as a reminder of the huge diversity of America itself; and it also enables the expression of every shade of opinion about the war, from pride and unquestioning commitment, through anger on behalf of troops not given the tools to complete a difficult job, to furious opposition.

*In Conflict* is not always an easy show to watch, and its pace sometimes flags slightly. But the quality of the acting from this young university company is simply breathtaking; and this is a show that commands attention from everyone who cares about the true story of the Iraq War, and about the real life of ordinary US citizens today, in the world's wounded superpower.

If I could make one small wish, for the women whose experiences make up the text of *Motherland* [another Fringe performance], it's that they could all be scooped up and brought along to the next performance of *In Conflict*; at least then they would know just how much they are not alone, in their pain, trauma and grief.