

'Tossed!'People Show Studios *Fringe*

There's magic in the air at People Show Studios. Here is a Fringe Shakespeare that's innovative and at times even breathtaking. 'Tossed!' is actually just a new name for 'The Tempest'; it's company Pants on Fire's first production, and by concentrating all its resources on the supernatural elements of this barmy little play it's found rich ground on which to unleash its combined creativity.

Its major coups are casting six actresses as the sprite Ariel, and a system of screens that provides cover as she sows confusion among the ship-wrecked enemies of Prospero, her wronged master. In a favourite manoeuvre, several black screens are portered across the black stage in coordination, revealing different Ariels at different times. And blow me, doesn't it look as if she's teleporting herself from spot to spot! The Renaissance-style polyphonic score by Lucy Egger – exceptionally well-sung – enhances the mystique on all occasions.

But in bigging up the island's magical aspects, Pants on Fire forgets about its inhabitants. In the doubled-up main roles, Iain Tidbury is a sympathetic Caliban and Jonathan Tanner captures the Machiavellian spirit of Angelo. Otherwise the actors rather trust the visuals to get them through. It works – just – until the last half hour, when Tanner as Prospero is required to pull it all together. Then you realise that not only is Prospero struggling with his lines, but you don't give a damn about the characters whose fates he is resolving. Ah well, you can't have it all.

Kieron Quirke