

THEATRE

Ken Campbell's Theatre Stories

Cottesloe, RNT, London

No review of a Ken Campbell solo show is fully quorate without the words "genius" and "garden gnome". Indeed Mr Campbell has, for me, become so identified with the second of these things that it was his image that instantly floated into my mind when I read the reports of that East Berlin professor who – heartbroken at being exposed as a Stasi informer – "smashed to pieces his unique collection of garden gnomes". If they ever make a movie about this man, Mr Campbell could do a great double as both the gnomes and the professor.

Theatre Stories was first aired last year at the Royal Court as part of the Barclays New

Stages season. One strand that has you weeping with laughter tells of the great hoax Campbell played on Trevor Nunn and the RSC in the early Eighties when they were flush with *Nicholas Nickleby* success. On forged "Royal Dickens Company" notepaper, Campbell sent out letters, purportedly from Nunn, to everyone from the arts minister down, announcing that from now on Dickens would be at the centre of their operations. "So that will be it for the Bard, love Trev."

One definition of humour is a sense of proportion. To go to such effortful and epic lengths on a practical joke may therefore seem to argue a thin streak of deep humourlessness in the joker. An instinct for proportion is certainly not a quality you'd

look hard for in the man who was responsible for *The Warp*, a 22-hour marathon at the Science Fiction Theatre of Liverpool.

Campbell's genius is to come perilously close to being the kind of interminable nerd you'd switch trains to avoid. Like many of the funniest things I've seen this year (*Stunde Null*, Thomas Bernhard's *Eve of Retirement*) this show hovered teasingly on my boredom threshold. Part of the hilarity is that you think: any second now I'm going to switch from being elated to being bored out of my skull. That never happens. Perhaps even now Campbell is forging letter paper with the logo Royal Notional [sic] Theatre: "So that will be it for theatre, love Trev."

Booking: 0171-928 2252 in rep

Paul Taylor

Campbell Taylor Indy



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