

Yesterday was a slow day by any measure. X left to return to the US and I took some time to relax, read, and generally just be lazy. I did sojourn down to Leicester Square to procure a ticket to see *The Frontline*, by ChÃ© Walker, at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre down in Southwark, a recreation of original Globe Theatre, and a pretty good one at that.

Lucky for me I had a seat in dress circle (first balcony) and sheltered, as the Globe is open roofed, and the hoi polloi stand up in the courtyard and their only recourse in case of rain (like the light mist at curtain time) is rain coats or ponchos, anyone opening a bumbershoot will be roundly booed, or worse.

The plot of *The Frontline* is the life in the direct vicinity of an underground station somewhere in the East End of London:



There is an underground strip club; a couple of food vendors, one selling hot dogs and the other selling Korma, locked in friendly competition; a religious group; a handful of drugs dealers, and various other habituÃ©s of the area. We watch them all interact and most of the time the beautifully sculpted dialogue is taking place on two, three or four levels at once. A drug dealer is taunting his rival while a stripper is teasing her bouncer while a evangelist is converting a sinner while the hot dog vendor is berating the Afghani vendor. That we can make any sense out of this at all is testament to the skillful direction of Matthew Dunster and the cast's remarkable sense of timing.

I loved this show. It handled many of the same issues that *English People Very Nice* did, but with more humour, grace and effect. It did not aspire to the full throated assault on English bigotry that show did, but it still handled the subject deftly, as in a scene in the first act where a black stripper and a white drugs kingpin get into a debate about British society and who has a right to claim priority.

A rollicking good night at the theatre, and a show I would love to see transition to film or video. One interesting thing overheard at interval; one usher to another "This one gent just left, said he was only two days off the plane from the States and couldn't understand a word of it!"

While the promotional materials all warned about rough language and subject matter, none of them warned about the thick cockney accents and sometimes impenetrable language. But the script is so masterful, so well written, so peppered with intelligent, sophisticated, vocabulary stretching words and turns of phrase that Shakespeare's own theatre was certainly a well deserved home for this production. ChÃ© Walker has brilliantly earned the right to put his characters on Shakespeare's stage.