



Hans Teeuwen review – anti-PC standup demagnetises your moral compass

Soho theatre, London The aggressively odd Dutch comedian skirts Bernard Manning territory, but also forces you to interrogate your opinions while you laugh in astonishment

Brian Logan

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“I don’t know what your expectations are.” Pause. “But they’re too fucking low!”

Yes, it’s happening: Hans Teeuwen is back on the British stage. The Dutchman’s new set marks a change from the shows that made him a cult star during his last UK stint, six years ago. But not a mellowing: *Real Rancour*, as the show is called, stares down piety, sensitivity and your expectations of comedy with a ferocious glare. “We live in confusing times,” begins Teeuwen, who then spends an hour operating on that confusion like a delinquent infant with a scalpel.

What’s new is that he’s now less of a variety act. There’s no sock puppetry, no abstract mouth-music, fewer discrete set pieces altogether – although I cherished the one about trying to boost a stallion’s confidence by letting it see its own cock. Instead, sequences flow together like standup, albeit frequently disrupted by non sequitur bursts of song, like the yodelling country music ditty

about coming out of the closet, or the one that runs “Hey, brown-yellowish people / you’ve got the best skin colour in the whole wide world”.

As that lyric implies, Teeuwen is addressing sensitive subjects here, and more directly than in his earlier absurdist work. But that doesn’t mean thoughtful routines about politics - that’s not his style - so much as luridly off-message riffs about Jewish people and circumcision, say, or the sexual pleasure he brings to lesbians.

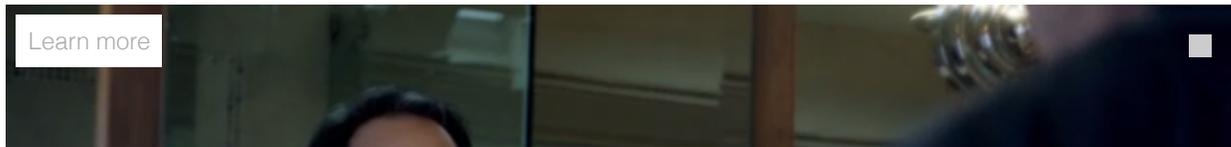
Some anti-PC comics strive so hard to assert their freedom of thought, they end up sounding like Bernard Manning. Occasionally that happens in Teeuwen’s show, but usually I was laughing - or thinking - too hard to care. There’s seldom much point parsing what Teeuwen is “saying”. His wild-eyed commitment, aggressively odd behaviour, and his oblique, vaguely malevolent facial expressions all work to scramble significance, and demagnetise whatever moral compass you thought you’d brought with you to the theatre.



Wild-eyed commitment ... Hans Teeuwen. Photograph: Murdo Macleod for the Guardian

You end up just marvelling at his control, his shamelessness, and at the different ways he has of making us laugh with puerile behaviour (there’s lots of gaudy sex), one-liners, and dream-logic changes of subject, as when suddenly he’s sharing top tips for murdering farmers while they’re milking their cows.

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There's a lull, just before the final act. The Walt Disney dialogue and the scene about eating birdshit - these are inessential. Then there's the promised Islam material, which is no hotter to handle than anything else. Allah in heaven sodomising a recently deceased suicide bomber is gleefully but not uniquely inflammatory. His line about Islam's "sheer joie de vivre!", delivered as if he were a teenager in love, brings the house down.

Yes, that joke draws on a derogatory, Eurocentric stereotype to which I don't subscribe. Like that other twisted, sometime-genius of world comedy, Doug Stanhope, whom he resembles in spirit, Teeuwen often says objectionable things. But, as queasy as it can be, I'd rather a comic who makes me puzzle, interrogate my own opinions, laugh with astonishment and feel the ground slip from under my feet, than one with whom I always agree. With this show, Hans is that man.

.At Harrogate theatre, 12 October. Box office: 01423 502116. Then touring.

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