

Review: Invisible Man at Rich Mix

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What does it take to become invisible? B. L. Sherrington reviews a stage adaptation of Ralph Ellison's novel as part of Certain Blacks Harlem Festival.

[B. L. SHERRINGTON](#)



Invisible Man at Rich Mix. Photo: Sarah Hickson.

What would it take for you to consider yourself invisible? Not in the Marvel Comics or Harry Potter sort of way. In a manner where you are perceived as less than human: an unseen creature. To mark the final night of Rich Mix's Certain Blacks Festival, Paul Anthony Morris delves into just such a questionable existence by way of his theatrical adaptation of Ralph Ellison's novel, *Invisible Man*.

Illegally occupying the basement of an attractive apartment block, the Invisible Man (George Eggay) boasts of successfully divesting himself of all emotional ties in order to aid his survival and recover from the devastating psychological effects of marginalisation.

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Straight away, the audience are subjected to what the Invisible Man endures day in and day out in a pitch-black room initially lit by only a match. Dressed in a creased white shirt, worn-out trousers and tweed hat, we soon discover how he used his ingenuity to light up the basement so it no longer

resembled a cave. Essentially the character is a middle-of-the-road, well-read and intelligent man with a sense of humour about his situation. He has pride when discussing his early years, specifically earning a scholarship to the State College for Negroes, but this weakens to regret when recalling the events that lead to his life in the basement.

On the surface, the character seems hardened to the world of pain and injustice, but as the play goes on he reveals a cunning smile. This smile is both a help and a hindrance to him. On one hand, his habit of grinning through trouble, as his late grandfather encouraged, has helped him. On the other, it has been a means of prioritising the ease of those around him, rather than focusing on his own happiness.

This notion of authenticity is particularly important to *Invisible Man* and is contained in both the production values – including the beautiful and historically accurate music supplied by the jazz band – and the themes underpinning it. Truth is always aimed for, even when that truth is uncomfortable. In one of the most effecting moments, the police are shown shooting men in front of young children, despite their lack of resistance and appeals of surrender.

Eggay successfully carries the one-man show through to the final, hard-hitting line, “I’m Coming Out” , used to signal his choice to end his seclusion and head back into society. As a whole, the production is electric with passion, reminding constantly that the issues of racism and isolation still plague the present day. It is bitter sweet that Ellison’s story has been somewhat forgotten by the youth of today, despite many finding themselves in similar situations.

Invisible Man was performed at Rich Mix. Click [here](#) for more details.

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