

# Hands up who's against the war

Armed with passionate self-criticism and a broad-based disaffection, these young Americans are making a stand

DANCE & PHYSICAL THEATRE  
GET YOUR WAR ON

★★★  
ASSEMBLY @ AURORA NOVA (VENUE 8)

THEATRE  
CHANGE: THE UPCOMING WAR WITH IRAN ★★★  
ASSEMBLY @ HILL STREET THEATRE (VENUE 41)

POPSICLE'S DEPARTURE ★★★★  
ASSEMBLY @ ST GEORGE'S WEST (VENUE 157)

DURING the George W Bush years, the Edinburgh Fringe has become a great gathering place for disaffected young Americans, raging against the wrong turning they feel their society has taken; this year, that stream of passionate self-criticism runs as strongly as ever, and with a sharper focus.

At Aurora Nova, for example, the delicious Rude Mechs company of Austin, Texas, present *Get Your War On*, a cheeky short history of the war



**Joyce McMillan**

on terror based on the internet comic of the same name by David Rees. Both comic-strip and show take the form of a series of highly ironic water-cooler conversations about contemporary politics, conducted by a group of conventional-looking 1950s-style office workers gobsmacked by the direction their country seems to be taking. Rude Mechs tackle the material in Wooster Group style, using separate desks and overhead projection screens to show frames from the comic-

strip, news images, or little live sequences of moving graphs and patterns. And even if the material, going back to 2001, is now pretty familiar, the style is impressively slick and witty, and strangely touching: an image of an ordinary America still in possession of its wits and its freedom of speech, and not nearly dumbed-down enough to accept Bush's world vision.

At Hill Street, by contrast, Mark Soper's *Change: The Upcoming War with Iran*, presented by previous Fringe First winners Spankin' Yanks, is both much messier, and far more frighteningly topical. Set in Washington DC today, it tells the story of Bob Ellis, a liberal academic and policy advisor who is being sucked into the dying Bush administration, in order to give some intellectual respectability to the idea of pre-emptive war on Iran. Bob is a good man in politics, willing to compromise with power in order to make a difference, but here, the web of power woven around him is so corrupt that

the play begins to look like a tragedy.

There's too much *West Wing*-style wheeling and dealing, not enough focus on the central dilemma; but there's some formidable grown-up acting here, from a strong cast led by Jack Klaff, and in its first half at least, this is an impressive play about personal responsibility and political power, at the current turning-point in global politics.

At St George's West,

All shows until 27 August. *Get Your War On*, tomorrow 7pm; *Change: The Upcoming War with Iran*, today 2pm; *Popsicle's Departure*, today 1.20pm



Picture: Jacques-Jean Tizou