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Shiverman

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Is an ancient culture, barely touched by the western world, filled with rich storytelling traditions and exotic simplicity, worth protecting more than human rights? This is the dramatically charged question behind James Sheldon's provocative exploration of the Okoku Valley - a barely touched paradise similar to the islands of Melanesia, evoked in such detail that it's surprising to find out that it's entirely fictional.

Beneath a canopy of trees, in the secluded clearing of Nicky Bunch's inviting set, a middle-aged underemployed and oversexed anthropologist, Roy, attempts to persuade a workaholic UNESCO representative, Dominique, that the valley should be made a World Heritage Site in order to protect it from Chinese developers. Dominique initially agrees - until she finds out Okoku traditions aren't just about handmade ceramic flutes, but also about forcing young women to have sex with the group's elders. Meanwhile, vivacious research student Terri doesn't see what the problem is and risks the wrath of the fabled Shiverman in order to continue her never-ending backpacking tour.

The fast boiling, if hastily concluded script brilliantly pits liberal values against one another and is engagingly delivered by the cast under the direction of Tom Littler. Benjamin Cawley's warm portrayal of football-obsessed local boy Tatalau'e is compellingly conflicted, but the absence of any Okoku female characters on stage feels like a sad reflection of women's lack of voice elsewhere in the world.



Paul Mooney (Roy Turner), Eleanor Wyld (Terri) and Benjamin N Cawley (Tatalau'e) in *Shiverman* at Theatre 503, London (previous picture shows Fisayo Akinade as Tembe)

Photo: Tristram Kenton

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Production information

Theatre503, London, May 1-26

Author: James Sheldon

Director: Tom Littler

Producer: Theatre503 and Primavera

Cast includes: Fisayo Akinade, Benjamin N Cawley, Lisa Kay, Paul Mooney, Eleanor Wyld

Running time: 2hrs 10mins

Production information displayed was believed correct at time of review. Information may change over the run of the show.