

COME TO WHERE I'M FROM

by Vinay Patel

Notes:

Italicised text indicates a refined, older woman's voice. It should be delivered to one side of the audience.

Bold text indicates a rough, teenaged boy's voice. It should be delivered to the other side of the audience.

Uninflected text indicates my voice (whatever you perceive that to be). It should be delivered straight down the middle.

A double asterix (**) indicate stage directions.

When Vinay Patel addressed the Oval House Theatre on the evening of the fourth of July 2016, surely the last thing the audience expected was for him to drop his trousers.

Good evening everyone.

And yet, as you will know, upon reaching the climax of his performance, this is precisely what happened.

My name is Vinay...and Vinay has asked me to speak for him tonight about himself and where he's from. He's asked me to do this for several reasons, but mostly 'cause he feels the way he currently presents himself doesn't suggest his past and he's worried that, in looking back, my part of him will fade from the story and it's important shit. Like how I'm really good at French.

Like *really* good.

That I know my music. That I play in a band. That I see my mates from home. But he don't do any that anymore, 'cause he spends all his time at short play nights where everyone is beautiful and talented and every third person is the kid of someone rich and/or famous, which he

apparently finds “problematic” but I think sounds really cool.

I gather he was going through a difficult period, both with his relationship to the arts and himself. Some have seen the dropping of the trousers as a provocation, a reminder that our craft lives in its liveness and its daring. Others, of course, have been keen to insist that it merely foreshadowed the tragedy to come.

In fact, he’s not even sure that this is the right voice now doing the speaking. He’s watched loads of YouTube videos, right, to check what he must’ve sounded like in the early 2000s but it’s still a bit put on and whilst he was YouTubing he recalled that his Dad made him go elocution lessons for a bit when he was in primary school, perhaps cause no-one in his family sounds particularly well-spoken and his Dad figured “it will help you get on in the world, son”, like he was some sort of chubby Asian Dickens.

Turns out there’s a lot about himself that Vinay’s forgotten.

Indeed, since Vinay’s passing, many have speculated on his admittedly bizarre death. The local papers have somewhat made a game of it. I will say right away that in this biography...slash memoir...I am not going to indulge those questions. Rather, when I speak of him, I’d like to focus on his life. His loves. The facts.

Right! So he was technically born and raised in South East London but for secondary school he went outside, boo-hiss, literally just outside, to this town called Dartford, Daaaaartford!, where he makes some great mates, smart, equally bullied, and whose idea of a good time is taking photo of their arses.

It’s just what we do around here.

The boys all take a photo of their arse - such a great word, arse - we’d take a photo, then mix them up and you have to guess whose arse is whose.

I say we...Vinay never risks it, he’s too chicken, but he dresses it up to be

about how he's the only brown kid in the group and so it'll be very obvious whose arse is his. Which, to be fair, does makes sense.

He also joins the school choir 'cause he's like that and Mr. Royale - the coiffured, Stereophonics-loving, Mazda-driving hero that ran it - asks "what's with that fancy accent?" so Vinay let it loosen up, lets Dartford into his soul, which is how you get me. The accent shift is tricky to understand so, in a way you lot will get, it's the difference between this place, this space, having two syllables "theat-er" and three syllables -

The-at-er is what he was first known for, but it was not his first love, perhaps because his home borough of Bexley is one of only two in London to not have a permanent building. I sometimes wonder what would've become of his nascent interest in the stage if this hadn't been the case. Perhaps he would've written more plays. Certainly they would've been better.

His first love was a girl called Sarah. She's married now I'm told. Good for her. I mean, at this moment in time, we're still going out, so was a bit weird to hear that, but nice to know she'll be happy one day. Apparently everyone Vinay's ever loved is married now. Awkward.

But that's alright, if he's lucky he'll meet a nice girl someday and in fact the reason I'm talking about love at all is precisely 'cause thirty year old Vinay reckons he left his ability to accept affection and to give it back, he thinks he left that somewhere behind with me and he doesn't think he can truthfully talk about where he's from without a person who knows what love feels like guiding it.

It's like, if I can do that, if I can trace his steps back through the London I know, *he* might have a shot at a future in the London *he* knows. Which, just saying, is *a lot* of pressure for him to have put on me. 'specially since the London I'm "from" don't exist anymore. Does it?

In your London, the city's all about turning land into money. That's city a fiction to me. My London, the IMAX was til recently a cardboard city. The Astoria, my favourite gig venue, is for venting the frustration of youth, not the fumes of Crossrail. There's no fucking cable car or London Overground and Peckham is actually shit, not fashionably shit and -

****He shrugs with dismay****

Maybe that's just what a city is though, yeah? Unmoored, overwritten, replaced, living. Yeah...yeah...and like...

****A revelation comes to young Vinay and he struggles to contain it****

Being "from" somewhere's kinda the same innit? It's a place, a time, a people, leaving such a mark on you that it changes who you are. The time you're there don't matter, it being where you grew up don't matter, I am potentially from every room I've ever given myself to including, one day, this one and you know what maybe, maybe the reason Vinay can't love anymore is simply cause he's just become a self-involved prick. Holding on too much, hell he can't even leave *me* behind and that's just -

So what happened to Vinay after - as I've come to call it - The Night of the Arse.

****The "arse" lingers****

Did you hear that?

After all, it was the immediate move from London down to Ashburton, near to Exeter, just on the moor, that would come to define his life more than any other.

Sorry, are you hearing this? This lady?

It was here that he formally gave up the plays in order to foster one of the two great passions of his remaining life - becoming a tor guide. That's not a misprint, it's not t-o-u-r but rather t-o-r, as in the big rocks, he became a guide and historian of big rocks that have specific names. It is, of course, these writings for which he is best known today.

Really? Jesus Christ...

The other great passion was, and I hope this doesn't sound too cheesy, but

it's only as he put it, every morning. That other great passion was us.

Aw.

Back then I wasn't yet an artistic director of course, I was an eager young lighting designer of all things, recently graduated from a Masters having left behind a potentially lucrative career in document scanning. My mother was particularly upset about that decision and was happy to let me know that whenever I came home to Chesterfield for Christmas, which was the only time I felt absolutely obligated to do so. I guess I was still hoping to find a life in what I loved, it didn't seem too unreasonable then.

Nothing does when you're still open to the whims of the world.

You know what. I'm...I'm just gonna -

I adored the Big Smoke which I had adopted as my home but it had begun crushing me to be honest, and one ginned up evening I speculatively applied for a permanent role at the Northcote Theatre in Exeter. More a cry for help than anything and I was stunned rather than delighted to find I'd been offered the position. More surprising still was how eager Vinay was for me to go and for him to come with me. I'd already taken him for a lifelong Londoner, but when he asked my permission to tag along, he made very clear that he didn't care what he did or how he made his life as long as he made it with me.

Which, as you might imagine, was a bit much for a third date.

I need to - time to be from somewhere else, mate.

We discussed it at some length during the second, more mutual, de-trousering which occurred shortly before we squeezed into my single bed in Peckham Rye, which was not yet the bastion of the super rich that we know it as today. Rather, it was, appropriately for the evening, hah, up-and-coming. You might even say it was betwixt these two very distinct abandonings of dignity that our love was forged.

It saddens me now of course that he perished re-creating that moment on

our 35th wedding anniversary, any deeper meaning to the act lost since that fateful day where he tripped on his pants and brained himself on the Aga.

I'm gonna leave you with a present.

He never spoke much of his past, didn't think it was relevant.

A parting gift.

The closest I ever got to understanding were the first words we ever shared. I was there that night at Ovalhouse. A last minute impulsive decision to put off deciding on the Exeter job.

The risk I never took.

**** Vinay put his thumbs into his trouser lining****

Most of the plays were wonderful, a real smorgasbord from some of the country's finest talents. His, on the other hand, was utter nonsense, the incoherent cod-philosophical ramblings of what felt like a teenage boy, leavened only slightly by the partial nudity which I quite enjoyed, and catching him at the bar after his "performance", all I could think to ask was why he had even bothered doing what he did.

Bon voyage, mon ami!

He turned to me and, with an apologetic smile, he said...

**** Trousers are dropped. Maybe. A long pause as "real" Vinay emerges, blinks****

That's just what we do around here.