**The B\*easts – pre show notes**

B – asterisk – easts. That’s what the title of this show looks like – beasts, with an asterisk between the first and second letter. It’s a monologue written and performed by Monica Dolan, which has transferred to the Bush Theatre after an award-winning run at the Edinburgh Fringe.

The performance lasts for an hour with no interval. Because it is an unbroken monologue, it will not be possible or necessary to audio describe it, but the visual elements of the production are summarised in the following notes.

For this production, the seating is arranged in tiered rows all facing a stage at one end of the auditorium. The stage is dark, except for a pool of light at the front. In the pool of light is a grey barrel armchair, the kind where the arms and back curve round the seat in an unbroken line.

It has a pale cushion propped against the back, and a simple wooden side table to its right. On it are a white table lamp, a tablet, and a phone. A shelf below supports some hardback books and a white box of tissues.

It is a relaxing scene, made more so by the easy listening music which fills the air as we take our seats. It also gives nothing away. The colours are neutral, the few objects strictly functional. We realise why as soon as Monica Dolan settles into the armchair, and identifies herself as a psychotherapist. This is her work space, but being between clients, she is talking to us.

The psychotherapist’s name is Tessa. She is in her thirties, with a feathery cap of dark brown hair surrounding her neat-featured face. Her expressive eyes are dark, her pale skin enlivened with a subtle touch of blusher. She is casually dressed for work, but her outfit has been assembled with care, and, like the room, is in neutrals.

She wears a crisp white shirt with a Peter Pan collar, its lines soft rather than sharp. Over this is a long silky beige tunic with elbow length sleeves; it is loose, and slit to the waist on each side. The fabric falls to mid thigh, and drapes her figure softly as she sits in the chair. The outfit is completed with loose charcoal trousers and brown leather ankle boots.

Tessa wears no jewellery. She carries a large chestnut leather tote bag, in which at one point she roots for a packet of e-cigarettes, and another time fishes out a miniature bottle of alcohol. We don’t know what the drink is, but when she produces it, it sometimes gets a laugh!

The moment she walks in she engages us, smiling, poking her head forward with a questioning look, shifting in her chair, hands busy with a drink or an e cigarette. As time passes she becomes more still, but never stops looking at us, inviting reaction with a raised eyebrow or making a point with a shrug. Once or twice her phone rings, and as she answers it she stands, a hand on one hip, before settling back in the chair and resuming her one-sided conversation with us.

However intimate the subject becomes, she never drops her guard, so that the sensation is not like talking with a friend, but similar to a chance encounter at a party, with important things said between strangers in a neutral, time-limited setting.

The lighting for B\*easts is designed by Tom Clutterbuck, and the set by James Button. The director is John Hoggarth, and the monologue is written and performed by Monica Dolan.

When you book to attend the show, please let us know if you have any special requirements, such as help to navigate to your seat, or someone to care for your guide dog during the performance. We hope you understand our decision not to audio describe this production, and assure you that the audio description service will resume for the rest of the season.