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What's On

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The accusatory aftermath of a school shooting and a queer dystopia where emotions can be removed are among the highlights of our latest Fringe theatre round-up. Words by Susan Mansfield, Josephine Balfour-Oatts, Fiona Shepherd and Suzanne O'Brien

1 7 Minutes ****

Gilded Balloon Teviot (Venue 14) until 28 August

At a high school somewhere in Ohio, a 15-year-old takes out his father's assault rifle and guns down 11 teenagers. But the focus of Scott Organ's play, staged by theatre company Barrow Group, is not on the tragedy itself but on Sheriff's Deputy Andy Rubens and the 17 minutes between the first shot being fired and the arrival of the SWAT team.

In those 17 minutes, 11 young people lost their lives and Rubens appeared to do nothing. In the course of the play, this apparent inactivity is called into question by a detective, by Rubens's closest colleagues, and finally – movingly – by one of the bereaved parents. He says he followed procedure, but the unspoken question – why didn't he run toward the shots and attempt to subdue the gunman? – hangs powerfully over his head.

The strong cast of six is led by Larry Mitchell as the stoic, stubborn Rubens, neither accepting any culpability nor giving a satisfactory explanation for his behaviour. There are also particularly strong performances from Michael Giese as the father of the killer, and Lee Brock as Mrs Bauserman, who lost her son in the shooting.

The naturalistic style of Seth Barrish's production feels unusual for the Fringe, and Organ's play moves at a stately pace, posing its questions in forensic detail. Edward T Morris' slick, pared-back set functions as police station, school, pub and home.

In the face of another senseless tragedy, Rubens is an easy target for blame yet it can't be made to stick. Having someone to blame implies a narrative of cause and effect, imposing meaning on events which are often meaningless, when the only true culprit is a broken system. **Susan Mansfield**

