

17 Minutes review



“Soul-searching stuff”

REVIEWS AUG 10, 2023 BY FERGUS MORGAN GILDED BALLOON TEVIOT, EDINBURGH



17 Minutes at Gilded Balloon Teviot, Edinburgh. Photo: Edward T Morris

Stirring play exploring the aftermath of a school shooting

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The title of this American drama, *17 Minutes*, refers to the time its protagonist – policeman Andy Rubens – spent standing, frozen with fear, outside a school while a student opened fire on his classmates inside. Over seven scenes, Scott Organ’s play tracks the aftermath of the shooting and the impact of Andy’s inaction – on his community, on his job, on his relationship and himself. It does not say so, but the play is presumably inspired by the 2018 school shooting in Parkland, Florida, which subsequently faced criticism around the police response to the incident.

It is stirring, soul-searching stuff. In each scene, Andy interacts with someone connected to the tragedy: a world-weary detective, his wife, the colleague that eventually apprehended the shooter, the shooter's father and, finally, a victim's mother. Andy disintegrates, scene by scene. "I did what I was trained to do," he insists, again and again, although it is obvious that he did not. Organ charts the cracks in his shield of self-denial meticulously: when he finally shatters, it is mightily moving.

This is not just a portrait of one man, torn apart by an atrocity, though. *17 Minutes* is also a contemplation of school shootings and how subsequent attempts to find meaning in the meaningless tragedy result in bitterness and blame games.

Seth Barrish's staging for New York City theatre company the Barrow Group, which arrives in Edinburgh after an acclaimed run Off-Broadway, is just as polished and precise. The six-strong cast supplies a set of excellent, authentic, understated performances on Edward T Morris' functional set. Larry Mitchell is particularly good as the bullish, then bitter, then utterly broken Andy.