

Theatre

GITE A LA MER

PEBBLEFACES

Brighton Festival

HOVE ★★ ★ / ★★ ★

In a city that has experienced the UK's highest property price rises over the last decade, you couldn't get a more topical drama than *Gîte à La Mer*, a Brighton Festival fringe play about a young househunting couple who find that all they can afford is a beach hut.

At Beach Hut 48, you can step through a pair of red curtains, sit at a table and hear a recording of this short comedy played in its cosy real-life setting. The beach hut, billed as "the smallest theatre in the world, probably", seats two and the door is left open so you get a live soundscape of seagulls squawking and waves crashing.

Written by Damian Barr and Laura Lockington and originally broadcast on Radio 4, the play is set in the not-too-distant future in the seaside city of BriHo. Tom and Jordan are a couple down from London who are struggling to get onto the property ladder and meet estate agent Simon Flutter.

Flutter's attempts to talk up the beach hut in estate-agent speak are delightful. He celebrates the hut's sea

views and its main (and only) room, which serves as an "open-plan, live/work, study/sleep space".

There are fissures in Tom and Jordan's relationship and each confides in Flutter when left alone with him. A couple of nice twists makes this 15-minute drama an entertaining and wry commentary on the property market.

At Beach Hut 118, an exhibition of faces on pebbles by the artist Raysto shows that Brighton still has an irreverent underside. Raysto's pebble faces are drawn or painted in permanent ink on small stones, usually about an inch in diameter.

The pebble faces are cute and tactile, with cartoonish big eyes and surprisingly vivid expressions. A few are reminiscent of Picasso's early line drawings, others look like Egon Schiele faces.

But it's when they are photographed and blown up in scale that the pebble faces take on a curiously classical appearance. Raysto likes to leave them at odd spots around town, such as on railings, in bars, and on the beach. The crowd, he says, is constantly growing and dispersing. A lovely thought.

JANE HUGHES

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'Gîte à La Mer', Beach Hut 48, to 27 May, 12pm to 5pm, weather dependent; 'Pebble-faces', Beach Hut 118 (www.raysto.co.uk), 26-27 May; information 01273 709709