

Wrestlelads wrestle review



“Crash course in physical empowerment”

REVIEWS MAR 10, 2025 BY OLIVER JONES BATTERSEA ARTS CENTRE, LONDON



The cast of *Wrestlelads wrestle* at Battersea Arts Centre, London. Photo: Chris Payne

Dynamic, probing theatrical sports extravaganza explores issues of ritualised and real-world gender-based violence

SHARE THIS



We live in an age of near-perpetual rage, exacerbated by social media and jaw-dropping irresponsibility from world leaders. Acclaimed theatremaker [Jennifer Jackson](#) knows all about anger, having witnessed gender-based racial violence as a Latinx Anglo-Bolivian girl raised in Coventry. As a pre-teen, she found a means of channelling vengefulness: her mother placed her in a judo dojo, a martial arts practice space, where she went on to become the under-50kg British Judo champion. Now she offers us a crash course in physical empowerment in an extraordinary collision of judo tutorial and tournament with elements of theatrical storytelling, dance, thrilling live drumming and wildly OTT pro-wrestling histrionics. But once you have the ability to win a fight, can you be sure to use it wisely?

Directed by [Sarah Frankcom](#) on a minimalist set of coloured crash mats, with a raised dais for excellent drummer Isobel Odelola's full kit, Jackson's piece first introduces us to co-deviser/writer Simon Carroll Jones, who outlines a few ground rules. Wittily augmented by captioning from lighting designer [Sarah Readman](#), these include no punching or kicking, no touching of the face, and no “press-studs in the the underpants”. Enter Jackson, a diminutive, dynamic presence with a shock of curly auburn hair, who tells us, quizzically,



Oliver Jones

Oliver Jones has worked as an actor, playwright, theatre-in-education practitioner, editor, journalist, theatre critic and art critic. He currently works full-time with young people with special educational needs

More from this author

[Wrestlelads wrestle review](#)

[The Koala Who Could review](#)

[There's a Bear on My Chair review](#)



Reviews

[Wrestlelads wrestle review](#)

[Dear Martin review](#)

[Death of a Salesman review](#)

[Osipova/Linbury review](#)

[Chef review](#)

[Glorious! review](#)

JOBS

Summer Theatre Jobs in America

City: New York

Salary: SALARY + FR...

APPLY

how her mother was assailed by racist abuse in a department store queue, while the abuser's unspeaking wife looked on. Then, in one of many startlingly effective jolts in form and tone, she and Carroll Jones, accompanied by Odelola's pounding rhythms, engage in a fascinating Dance Apache – a savage fin-de-siècle street dance involving simulated slapping and smiting – in which the female participant is eventually subdued. Jackson then coolly demonstrates how, using judo techniques, she can eject a drunken sex pest from a house party.

Continues...

RELATED TO THIS REVIEW



Battersea Arts Centre receives extended rent-free lease ahead of 50th birthday



One Day When We Were Young review



Requardt & Rosenberg: Super Normal Extra Natural

Jackson, who holds a BSc in psychology, repeatedly returns to her story of abuse, each time changing salient details – like a person re-enacting revenge scenarios in their head, making events ever more credible. She also hints at other troubling aspects of retribution: woman-on-woman violence; alienating the well-intentioned, especially men. As Jackson performs increasingly extreme judo moves on Carroll Jones to [Jose Guillermo Puello](#)'s unsettling electronic score, he grows increasingly uncomfortable – as do we. This becomes more acute when Jackson invites 20 young women from local London dojos on to the stage, who bound on to blaring pop music and garish video displays evoking televised wrestling (superbly realised by [idontloveyouanymore](#)), who each get to practise throwing Carroll Jones. I couldn't but help think of bullying on a global scale when one judoka with the moniker Golden Score ran on through the audience as a shower of blow-up dolls descended on our heads.

Fortunately, though, Jackson's most artfully consistent feat is in recreating the calm, nurturing atmosphere of a sports space – where women can push themselves in a mutually respectful, playful environment. Much like theatre itself.

Touring to [Cambridge Junction](#), 19-20 March

For all the latest reviews from *The Stage*, sign up to our weekly reviews newsletter [here](#)

Deputy Head of Electrics

City: London

Salary: SOLT/BECTU ...

APPLY

Theatre Technician

City: Winchester

Salary: £23,409 - £...

APPLY





Production Details

Production name	Wrestleladswrestle
Venue	Battersea Arts Centre
Location	London, then Cambridge Junction, Cambridge
Starts	04/03/2025
Ends	08/03/2025
Running time	1hr 20mins
Author	Jennifer Jackson, Simon Carroll Jones
Composer	Jose Guillermo Puello
Dramaturg	Sarah Dickenson
Director	Sarah Frankcom
Set designer	Katie Scott
Lighting designer	Sarah Readman
Sound designer	Jose Guillermo Puello
Video/projection designer	idontloveyouanymore .
Cast includes	Jennifer Jackson, Simon Carroll Jones, Pepa Duarte, Isobel Odelola
Technical manager	Meghan Bartual Smyth
Production manager	Liz Barker
Company stage manager	Alannagh Cooke
Producer	Eve Allin, Nick Sweeting

[bullying](#)
[gender equality](#)
[Productions](#)
[racism](#)
[Reviews](#)

SHARE THIS



Add New Comment

POST



More Reviews

Wrestleladswrestle review

BATTERSEA ARTS CENTRE, LONDON



Dear Martin review

ARCOLA THEATRE, LONDON



Death of a Salesman review

PAVILION THEATRE, GLASGOW



Osipova/Linbury review

LINBURY THEATRE, ROYAL OPERA HOUSE, LONDON



Most Read *Across The Stage this week*

1 Olivier Awards 2025: full list of nominations

6 Further casting announced for Ralph Fiennes season at Theatre Royal Bath

2 Royal Exchange independent review highlights 'significant leadership failures'

7 The Seagull review

3 Royal Exchange chief executive Stephen Freeman resigns after censorship row

8 Casting for cruises: what do performers need to make it at sea?

4 Actor Athena Stevens reaches settlement with Shakespeare's Globe

9 Pantomime Awards 2025: nominations in full

5 Edward II review

10 Olivier Awards 2025: what can we learn from this year's nominations?



Your subscription helps ensure our journalism can continue

Invest in The Stage today with a subscription starting at just £7.99

SUBSCRIBE

NEWSPAPER

- News
- Reviews
- Opinion & Advice
- Features
- Long Reads
- Big Interviews

MORE

- Archive
- Dating
- Suppliers
- Get Into Theatre
- Jobs
- Tickets
- Training

INFO

- About
- Contact Us
- Advertising Enquiries
- Where to buy
- FAQs
- Press
- Careers

AWARDS

- The Stage Awards
- The Stage Debut Awards

LEGAL

- Terms and conditions
- Advertising terms and conditions
- Contributor agreement
- Privacy policy
- House rules
- GDPR Requests

DIGITAL

- Digital Editions
- Mobile Apps
- Newsletter



Subscribe

Start a subscription today from just £7.99

SUBSCRIBE