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## Unsung

at Summerhall



Valentijn Dhaenens presents the fall from grace of a political animal.



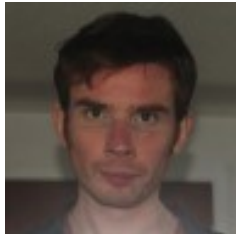
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STEVEN FRASER | 6 AUG 2018

Performer and author **Valentijn Dhaenens** stumbles onto the stage loosely holding a small bunch of banana's. He makes his way up to a microphone, awkwardly gives it a tap to make sure it is working and then begins to talk. For the next five minutes he addresses a conference. This could be an academic, political or business conference. It is difficult to tell, as his language is so vague and filled with needless words, he could actually be addressing anyone. Eventually he cracks and acknowledges that his speech is not working. This disharmony was foreshadowed in the excellent set design. The back of the stage is a total mess. A large banner sits half rolled up and is haphazardly hanging as a backdrop. *Unsung* presents a character who is broken, tragic and self destructive. The instance of clarity when he realises his speech is flawed, is a rare moment of empathy. From here on in we see our protagonist begin a downward spiral and Dhaenens plays the role with nuisance and zeal.

Valentijn Dhaenens is a politician. He was indeed rehearsing a political speech. As well as the dishevelled backdrop there is a vertical monitor on the stage. This acts a large smart phone screen where we see iPhone footage of the politician as he addresses his absent wife. There is a ritualistic aspect to the protagonists behaviour. He is constantly seen unbuttoning his shirt, undoing his tie and unpacking new clothes. The politician is a go-getter. He is ready to rise to the top, he is drunk on power, but he neglects his family. The neglect of his wife is his downfall and the ritual we see on stage suggests he has been doing it over and over again.

The politician has failed as a father and husband and this comes to the fore when a secret is revealed. But his fall from grace does not feel dramatic and glorious enough. The politician is given the last word. Even though he is a failure he is still given centre stage to give one final speech. His narcissism and ego are left to shine one last time and the ending feels like a somewhat unsatisfying conclusion to an interesting performance.



**Steven Fraser / @stevenfraserart**

Steven is Spoken Word Editor for The Wee Review and also reviews theatre and movies. He studied animation and computer arts at university and currently freelances in illustration. He currently lives in Glasgow.

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