

INTRODUCTION/REVIEWS COVID-19 THEATRE 2022

The reviews, though singly edited and printed for the year of 2022 will inclusively be the sum total of all the shows in 2022, rather than the usual listings that I did previously regardless of being within the year. The reason for this change is because of Covid-19 which changed the whole course of theatre going and theatre productions. Many of the theatres just stopped producing, others shortened productions and runs while still others tried to digitalize their shows online. Many times shows were cancelled even when one has arrived to the theatre because the cast have been struck by the virus. Because of the insecurity of the running of the theatres or their plays I have not been able to do my usual style of reviewing and have instead incorporated the whole of the year with my comments and reviews as concise but fully realized in their productions. Audiences dwindled enormously and reviewing could no longer be consistent to the run of the shows in theatres.

westEND

CURRENT

London Theatreviews

GARRICK

****ORLANDO by VIRGINIA WOLF adapter NEIL BARTLETT director MICHAEL GRANDAGE décor/costume PETER MCKINTOSH lights HOWARD HUDSON composer/sound designer ALEX BARANOWSKI with EMMA CORRIN, DEBORAH FINDLAY, JESSICA ALADE, DEBRA BAKER, AKUC BOL, LUCY BRIERS, RICHARD CANT, MELISSA LOWE, JODIE MCNEE, OLIVER WICKHAM, MILLICENT WONG

Blanche Marvin Critique

This fantasy of the historical period that carries through with such imagination in this production is not only appealing to the imagination but to the intellect. It carried through beautifully the history of Orlando in this very enterprising production. Enclosed are other critics' reviews.

Time Out (*) Written By Andrzej Lukowski**

Emma Corrin is terrific as Virginia Woolf's iconic androgyne. Propelled by their arresting turn as Princess Diana in 'The Crown', Emma Corrin is on course to become Britain's first big non-binary acting star. And while that'll largely be as a result of portraying women on screen, the less commercially driven world of the stage is an opportunity to combine their mounting draw as an actor with work a little more explorative of gender. 'Orlando' is, in theory, the perfect vehicle. Virginia Woolf's 1928 novel – in part a tribute to her convention-defying lover Vita Sackville-West – is an exuberant, accessible romp that follows the long life of Orlando, an immortal, gender-switching androgyne. But this adaptation by Neil Bartlett and directed by Michael Grandage is a fluffed opportunity, a strange mix of fiddly overwroughtness and excessive brevity.

The bemulleted Corrin is great, and their initial entrance is a hoot: wearing a nightshirt and no pants, we see a cheeky flash of prosthetic willy as Orlando is introduced as a teenage Elizabethan boy. As the play progresses, Corrin shifts deftly from urchinish youngster to lovelorn young man to posh, poised woman with surprising subtlety. The odd dress aside, Orlando never really looks any different, they just feel different. Corrin deftly code-switches between masculinity and femininity on an almost subliminal level – it's pure body language, gender as a literal performance. Bartlett's big invention is to have a sort of chorus of Virginia Woolfs on hand to narrate, commentate, and occasionally join in. It's a striking act of whimsy to have most of the cast – including sole male member Oliver Wickham – in identical skirts, cardigans, glasses and wigs. And clearly 'Orlando' is a book that lends itself to a certain formal silliness. But really that base is covered by Deborah Findlay's entertaining realisation of pre-existing character Mrs Grimsditch, Orlando's pathologically down-to-earth housekeeper. She doesn't so much as raise an eyebrow at any aspect of her master-slash-mistress's centuries-long life (she too seems to be incidentally immortal), and Bartlett has given her several mischievous allusions to contemporary gender politics that puncture any sense this might get too worthy. But stuffing all the extra stuff plus the actual plot of the novel into 90 minutes means Woolf's text is boiled down to a glancing greatest-hits package. Orlando's relationship with Elizabeth I is basically reduced to a monologue; we get Woolf's famously virtuoso description of the frozen London of 1608 quoted word for word, but young Orlando's relationship with Millicent Wong's Sasha is too fleeting to leave much impression on us, despite its big impact on the young man. I think Bartlett and Grandage do convey a sense of the mischief in Woolf's book, but frequently they've done so at the expense of the actual story, and it seems daft that both can't be accommodated. I was also extremely not down with the way the Woolf chorus end up musing sadly about the author's suicide. It just seemed crass and gratuitous: 'Orlando' famously ends ebulliently unresolved, on the date the book was first published. Yes, Woolf died, some years later, but I'd question how relevant this is to 'Orlando'. But let's not get distracted by a questionable decision late on. There are lots of good things about this 'Orlando', but it's just too brief, to not enough end. It's fun, but it's not doing full justice to either Virginia Woolf's book or Emma Corrin's performance – an extra half an hour could have made a real difference. 25 November 2022 - 25 February 2023

Guardian (**) Written by David Jays**

Emma Corrin's Orlando is a flare of coltish charisma. Like its star, Neil Bartlett's giddy adaptation of Virginia Woolf's novel radiates gleeful intelligence, rampaging heart and tremendous fun. It couldn't feel more timely, and

it's glorious. Woolf wrote Orlando in 1928 as a love letter to Vita Sackville-West and a jeu d'esprit to dispel the shadows of *To the Lighthouse*. Over four centuries, Orlando sees despotic monarchy become the universal franchise, and somewhere in the 17th century, falls asleep as a man and wakes as a woman. A rompish wild-geese chase through time, place and gender, it takes tenacious hold of our imaginations. We meet Corrin's Orlando as a young, male Elizabethan aristocrat. There's a brief prosthetic dangle as he clambers into what Upstart Crow would call his puffing pants. In verdant green velvet, single pearl earring shivering beside a platinum scrub of hair, he's a gangling personality in process. The aged, querulous Elizabeth I (Lucy Briers) totters on in a blaze of crimson light, speaking in Shakespearean half-quotations (Hamlet's ghost meets Cleopatra). Ten years on, we're in wintry Jacobean London, on the frozen Thames. Will Sasha, niece of the Russian ambassador (AKA "Uncle Vanya"), warm Orlando's affections? She does, but abandons him with the thaw, and Orlando howls with first heartbreak. Mrs Grimsditch, Orlando's cajoling housekeeper – a delicious Deborah Findlay – remains steadfast, unfazed even by Queen Elizabeth ("If that woman's changed her linen since the Armada, my name's Sir Walter Raleigh"). Bartlett distils what he needs from the novel and his genius inspiration is a chorus of Virginia Woolfs. Timorous scribblers in worsted cardigans and sensible specs, they not only create Orlando's adventures, but live vicariously through them. The wild and restless sea beckons Orlando, every wave an adventure. On we sail, through Nell Gwyn's London ("work those oranges, girlfriend") and then to Turkey, where the untraumatic transformation from boy to girl takes place. Orlando may not fundamentally change, but the prism through which she is seen certainly does. Goodbye property rights, hello misogyny. No wonder Orlando discards her constricting frock to enjoy the freedom of the town and a companionable night with a sex worker ("as the lady novelist said to the incidental working-class character," quips splendid Millicent Wong). Lying in wait is the bonneted horror of Victoriana, era of Woolf's own upbringing, where prune-faced Virginias rattle disapproving teacups. In Michael Grandage's buoyant production, each leap through history summons another clothes rail – new era, new trousers. Peter McKintosh's lavishly spare designs are breathlessly lit by Howard Hudson and theatricality suffuses Bartlett's writing – that giddy arena where style snogs sincerity. His heartfelt and insinuating collage offers winking allusions to everything from Jacobean tragedy to Liza Minnelli via *Some Like It Hot* ("nobody's perfect!"). Corrin addresses us with the assurance of privilege and a true friend's candour. Whatever the costume, they retain a contemporary slouch and in pensive moments, the actor gleams ivory in the moonlight, a puzzle to themselves. At a moment of toxic arguments around trans identity, this show arrives like a liberation. No intrusive discussion of lady parts or bathroom arrangements: how refreshing. The Virginias urge Orlando to hang on for untrammelled freedom – "if you can just live another century" – though Woolf herself won't survive past 1941. Orlando may swap sex and skim through centuries, but they're always Orlando, thrumming through Corrin's undimmed presence.

CURRENT

London Theatreviews

SOHOPLACE

***AS YOU LIKE IT by WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE director/adaptor JOSIE ROURKE décor ROB JONES lights HOWARD HARRISON sound JOHN LEONARD music MICHAEL BRUCE with LEAH HARVEY rosalind, ROSE AYLING-ELLIS celia, ALFRED ENOCH orlando, TOM MISON touchstone, MARTHA PLIMPTON jacques, ALLIE DANIEL amiens, TOM EDDEN duke frederick, DICKON GOUGH charles, GABRIELLA LEON audrey, MARY MALONE phoebe, SYAKIRA MOELADI hisperia, NATHAN QUEELEY-DENNIS silvius, CAL WATSON le beau, JUNE WATSON adam/corin, BEN WIGGINS oliver, MICHAEL BRUCE composer/pianist

Blanche Marvin Critique

Though the attempt to be inventive by using a deaf actor in the part of Celia, I found the reactions of the other critics deliberately sympathetic because of the deafness of the actress. An actual deaf person like my son found the inventiveness deliberate and unsatisfying which actually matched my own feelings. The reaction of the other critics is far more positive than mine but there was a liveliness and a vitality to the whole production. Enclosed are other critics' reviews.

Herbert: I was not really impressed with the performance although it is accessible for Deaf people to watch the performance with subtitles and BSL on the stage. It was rather poor visually, too much camouflage on the brown floor and costumes. Also the light was rather boring yellow dull, not movement with an exciting. There was a BSL interpreter on the upper row, with poor yellow light and too much shadow background and too far from our ground floor. Sign language is boring and flat. There should be 2 BSL interpreters on the stage so that everyone is able to see around the stage. The actors were very confused with communication methods, some spoke, some sign language, some silent, which one they talked about. The captions were not good, too yellow and old fonts hard to read. Many of us struggled to follow up their conversation, expressionless, maybe some of them are overreacting, trying to give an impression about Deaf friendly environment although it is a worse one. Only the positives were a theatre design for shape and colour in Shakespeare's times. It had beautiful scenes but it was a limited stage design. There was a clever design on the floor, opening the trap door, piano used for up and down. It costs a lot of money to make but there were little prop makers? I met a few Deaf friends so they were disappointed, didn't understand how to follow their sign language, and the atmosphere was flat. It is a shame the Director and Acting didn't fix the mixing of hearing and Deaf actors. There is a great need to improve more sharp flowing and clear communication to the audiences by Independent Deaf Advisor

Guardian (****) Written By Arifa Akbar

A piano, prominent on an otherwise empty stage, is a clear sign this production will place sound at the centre of Shakespeare's song-filled play. It is the first thing we hear and becomes this pastoral's most constant voice, syncopating its comedy and heightening its romance. The lovers, outcasts and locals who wander through Arden

tip winks to its composer pianist, Michael Bruce, and will him to “shut up” or to play on cue. That mime is part of a grander concept behind director Josie Rourke’s delicate and delightful production, which finds a perfect balance between West End spectacle and Shakespearean purity. The speeches of love, friendship and loyalty between characters come with the physicality and intimacy of British Sign Language, as central to the drama as music and song. It is organically interwoven and brings the play’s intensities surging to the surface. A lovably minx-ish Celia (Rose Ayling-Ellis) speaks to her banished cousin Rosalind (Leah Harvey) almost exclusively through sign, which sparks physical comedy and also genuine tenderness between them. It doubles up as their own secret language, of sorts, and their fellowship feels as strong as the love story between Rosalind and Orlando (Alfred Enoch), whose romance is giddy but genuine and both actors are naturals with the verse. Robert Jones’s set is a deceptively simple magic-box: a single, dangling chandelier at court but the stage filling up with leaves as we enter Arden in a sudden downfall of foliage from an arboreal tangle above. The falling forest creates a beautiful world of russet strewn leaves across the stage. The costumes change just as the scenery does, from gothic glamour at court – black, bejewelled Elizabethan dress, which looks like Alexander McQueen’s twist on ruffs and doublets – to countrywear. The set glows with Howard Harrison’s dewy light to build an intimacy that envelops the audience, too. Martha Plimpton, as Jaques, gives the play’s most famous lines (“All the world’s a stage”) a freshness and gravity and every other actor shines, too. The cast list is accompanied by pronouns, which feels fitting in Arden, a wilderness ripe with discovery and transformation. Harvey (they/them) plays Ganymede/Rosalind with a natural fluidity and there is no change of costume in the final revelation, which leaves gender identity subtly open-ended. And it is through sound that the reveal is made as Harvey leaps on top of the piano and bursts into song. “To liberty and not to banishment,” says Celia as she follows Rosalind into the forest. What an exquisite liberation this Arden is. 6 Dec 2022 – 28 Jan 2023

CURRENT

London Theatreviews

GIELGUD

***TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD by AARON SORKIN novel by HARPER LEE composer ADAM GUETTEL director BARTLETT SHER décor MIRIAM BUETHER lights JENNIFER TIPTON costumes ANN ROTH producer SONIA FRIEDMAN PRODUCTIONS, LINCOLN CENTER THEATER, JAMES L. NEDERLANDER, etc. with RAFE SPALL atticus finch, GWYNETH KEYWORTH scout finch, HARRY REDDING jem finch, DAVID MOORST dill harris, JUDE OWUSU tom robinson, TOM MANNION sheriff heck tate, PAMELA NOMVETE Calpurnia, etc.

Blanche Marvin Critique

I have seen far more inventive and moving productions of this tremendously moving piece of exciting theatre. This was a lack lustering production of a very exciting play. Enclosed are other critics’ reviews.

Evening Standard (****) Written by Nick Curtis

All rise for a magnificent Mockingbird. Sheer emotion and moral force make this Broadway adaptation of Harper Lee’s novel about race, community and family a powerfully uplifting theatrical event. Rafe Spall brings a wry charm and vitality to the role of the upright lawyer defending a black man against a false rape charge in depression-era Alabama. The lightness with which he wears his authority makes his explosions of anger more shocking and effective. The kids, played with just the right blend of chagrin and bravado by Gwyneth Keyworth and Harry Redding, remain a powerful emblem of future hope. They’re partnered by David Moorst, who won the Emerging Talent prize at the 2015 Evening Standard awards, as the wonderfully gawky young out-of-towner, Dill. Jude Owusu radiates stiff dignity as the accused Tom Robinson, and Pamela Nomvete a heavy fatalism as the Finches’ housekeeper Calpurnia – the only two substantial black roles. The folksy, down-home atmosphere is undercut by Sorkin’s unsparing portrayal of what really happens in poor, angry, hardscrabble households, his script studded with stinging uses of the N-word. The children often narrate the story and address the audience directly, which is very effective. With strong supporting performances, and a soundtrack for bellows-organ and acoustic guitar played on stage by Candida Caldicot and Frank Dawkins, the whole enterprise is both unbearably moving and surprisingly funny. 21 March 2022 – 13 August

Guardian (****) Written by Arifa Akbar

Rafe Spall is a dignified Atticus Finch in Aaron Sorkin’s smooth and confident adaptation, which finds modern-day resonances in the 1960 classic about racial injustice in the American south. Since the 2015 publication of Harper Lee’s second novel, *Go Set a Watchman*, it has become impossible to regard her first, feted book with the same innocence. Before then, *To Kill a Mockingbird* offered a beguiling child’s-eye view of a father’s stand against racial injustice in the deep south of the mid-1930s. Atticus Finch was the palatable white saviour who defended a black man in a hostile Alabama courtroom. But the second book’s indictment of Atticus as a racist, many years on from the doomed rape trial of Tom Robinson, irreversibly damaged his status as the story’s moral compass and heroic centre. So how to solve the problem of Atticus in any new telling of the original story? Aaron Sorkin finds effective ways in his confident adaptation, drawing out the lawyer’s moral inconsistencies without undermining his goodness completely. Rafe Spall’s quietly dignified Atticus is on the side of the law and a firm believer in American justice, rather than on the side of Robinson (Jude Owusu) or an early champion for race equality. The people of Maycomb are essential good, Atticus says, urging his children to respect their racist neighbours and to put themselves in the skins of the lynch mob that comes for Robinson, just as in the book. Except here the children decide for themselves what and who is right, and challenge him on it. The housekeeper Calpurnia (Pamela Nomvete, excellent) is also given a louder, angrier voice and she uses it movingly to stand up to Atticus too. Scout, Jem and Dill are all played by adults – a high-risk venture which pays off remarkably well, and brings gentle but genuine humour. Scout, the sure, stubborn tomboy is vividly played by Gwyneth Keyworth, Jem (Harry Redding) is less defined but still winning, while Dill (David Moorst) brings laughs but is the most contrived character. Dill was

based on Lee's close friend, Truman Capote, and he appears like a caricatured version of a young Capote: prissy, literary and comically fascinated by the etymology of words. The three bewitch and entertain nonetheless and jointly narrate the story so it becomes shared rather than Scout's. Sorkin rejigs the narrative smoothly, weaving together the children's world and the legal drama. The direction from Bartlett Sher is just as smooth, with some short scenes that yo-yo between the courtroom and the Finches' porch but never feel brusque. Miriam Buether's fast transforming set is fluid, mobile and unshowily gorgeous. While Lee's novel gives primacy to the children's games of make-believe for much of the early part of the story, this begins as a courtroom drama from the off, with a judge, jury and witness-stand wheeled on within minutes. Spall does not have the graceful self-containment of Gregory Peck's screen version but is more impassioned and dynamic in the courtroom scenes. The drama of the courtroom, as a whole, is when this production comes most fully alive, the testimonies of both Bob and Mayella Ewell (Patrick O'Kane and Poppy Lee Friar respectively, both sensational) are filled with tension, anger, betrayal and disbelief. There are modern-day resonances of Trump's left-behinds in their characterisations that feel utterly real and uncontrived; both father and daughter sneer at Atticus's intellectual elitism and could be today's forgotten populists of the rust-belt. The drama feels less taut out of the courtroom, particularly at the end when it winds up the plot. As a drama that hinges on Scout's memories of heroic fatherhood, Atticus still needs to emerge as the story's saviour, and he does so, although his final biblical invocations for change sound hollow. It ends on a seemingly sugary note, infused by Atticus's Christian hope, along with music and song. But this production, however quietly, offers a thorough indictment of the American justice system, from the bigoted white jury who convict an innocent black man against all the evidence in his favour – the echoes still resound today – to the vigilante justice condoned by the town sheriff. A dysfunctional judicial system, in an ugly southern town. One imagines the late Lee would approve.

CURRENT

London Theatreviews sent Oct 28/2022

THE DUKE OF YORK'S

**THE GLASS MENAGERIE by TENNESSEE WILLIAMS composer NICK POWELL director JEREMY HERRIN décor VICKI MORTIMER lights PAULE CONSTABLE costumes EDWARD K. GIBBON video ASH J WOODWARD producer SECOND HALF PRODUCTIONS, BOND ENTERTAINMENT GROUP, ATG PRODUCTIONS with AMY ADAMS amanda wingfield, VICTOR ALLI jim o'connor, LIZZIE ANNIS laura wingfield, TOM GLYNN-CARNEY tom wingfield, PAUL HILTON the narrator/tom wingfield

Blanche Marvin Review

This was Tennessee Williams' first production on Broadway which is the debut performance of actor Amy Adams' in a newly conceived production by Jeremy Herrin. Williams wrote this as a "memory play" which needed dim lighting effects and at times a lack of realism. The narrating character of Tom tells the story of himself as a young man, of his sister Laura, of his mother, and of his finally leaving home. This sensitive heart-rendering play of Williams' is autobiographical and therefore it touches the heart quite deeply. Jeremy Herrin in order to capture the middle-aged Tom narrating about the youthful Tom has decided to have two actors playing separately each of Tom's ages. This was never Tennessee Williams' intent. The point was for this middle-aged man to look back upon *himself* when he finally left home in order to make his life as a writer. Williams wanted the same actor to play the younger and older Tom portrayed by a great actor. The part of the older Tom as narrator does not substantiate itself as a complete character and so the basic choice in this production never carries that nostalgic feeling of memory if played by two actors. There isn't enough of the character to be divided. Tom played by Tom Glynn-Carney as young Tom and Paul Hilton as the narrator give substantial performances and do the best they can in a broken character.

Amy Adams, the famous film star, one-notedly plays the part of Amanda Wingfield, the temperamental mother who is desperate to find a husband for her disabled daughter Laura, (delicately enacted by Lizzie Annis) while trying to maintain her Southern girlhood standard of living in St Louis as a working mother. Her control over the life of her son Tom (Tom Glynn-Carney), who works at a shoe warehouse, from where he is desperate to escape as well as from a suffocating household in St. Louis, is her other preoccupation of domination. She is unrelentingly persistent over Laura whose shyness as well as her disability isolates her. Still, this middle-aged nagging mother, long dulled from being the southern Mississippi bell who once attracted 17 suitors in a single night, is enough to smother the aspirations of Tom and his search for a creative life. The play reaches its height in the scene where the mother has invited a gentleman caller, Tom's work mate, to dinner as a potential suitor for Laura. As it turns out he is an old school mate but engaged to be married. But he is gentle and kind with Laura who opens up for the first time and even shares her glass menagerie of animals with him. It is the one scene that steals the show and breaks the heart.

Paul Hinton as the narrating older Tom, as he looks back on his youth to tell his story, is always a truthfully convincing actor who manages to be the enhancing spirit while Glynn-Carney's younger Tom with a more temperamental part filled with desperation makes less of an impact. The sense of loss fills the melancholy mood of the play.....the loss of Mississippi roots with their move to St. Louis, the father who walked out on them, the escape from poverty and the demeaning labour, is enough reason to drive Tom to seek another kind of identity. Strange, that Amanda manages to adjust to the new circumstances more easily, despite her limited lifestyle, and yet still be determined for her disabled Laura to marry. And there is Laura, in a solo life more involved with her collection of glass animals, her glass menagerie than with people. This is a delicate tapestry of lonely people painted in delicate colours. How does one direct this inner-souled work when in the hands of a realistic director? Jeremy Herrin not only fails to bring to life the basic concept of the play or its mood, but does little to help the actors to bring to life the characters. Amy Addams as the southern mistress flatly lacks any of that southern bell

duality, nor arouses any sympathy as a solo parent with a handicapped child. Her presence and sense of survival was the counterbalance of lighting up the stage to the desperation of Tom. Only the poignant scene between Laura and Jim O'Connor as the gentleman caller illuminated a dark hole. Paul Hinton as the older Tom and narrator portrays the character of lost nostalgia rather movingly. Lizzie Annis as Laura and Victor Anni's Jim O'Connor as the "gentleman caller" in the most beautiful scene of the play still carry the work and the characters which leave us weeping. Their blackout scene in a candlelit non-romance moment, is so sensitively handled by Paul Constable's lighting that it is still breathtaking as it captures the height of nostalgia. Laura's dreams of a life with Jim, saving her from a confined space, may fade away but the moment with Jim will remain. Vicki Mortimer's broken set and Ash J Woodward's video don't add much to the broken part of Tom and leave us with a lack of any cohesive flow for a mood play that needs that kind of fluidity. It is sad that one of the most poetic plays of Tennessee Williams and the premiering of Jeremy Herrin's new company should be so disappointing. Tennessee Williams' *Glass Menagerie* has yet to be fully interpreted in the UK. Hopefully, it will succeed one day. No export. May 23 – August 28, 2022

CURRENT

London Theatreviews sent Oct 28/22

PLAYHOUSE

**CABARET book by JOE MASTEROFF based JOHN VAN DRUTEN'S play and stories by CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD music JOHN KANDER lyrics FRED EBB director REBECCA FRECKNALL music supervisor and director JENNIFER WHYTE décor TOM SCUTT lights ISABELLA BYRD costumes TOM SCUTT producer AMBASSADOR THEATRE GROUP PRODUCTIONS, GAVIN KALIN PRODUCTIONS, SMITH & BRANT THEATRICALS with FRA FEE emcee, AMY LENNOX sally bowles, OMAR BAROUD clifford bradshaw, VIVIEN PARRY fraulein schneider, ELLIOT LEVEY herr schultz, STEWART CLARKE ernst Ludwig etc.

Blanche Marvin Review

The Playhouse theatre has been transformed into a cabaret where the audience can eat and drink while watching the show. The outrageous interpretation has taken this serious musical that turned the tide of musicals, and made it into an entertainment, shocking as it may sound. The performances may be appealing to ordinary people without any intellectual interest, but who enjoy the acting, dancing, and singing of high caliber, ignoring the original message in addition to the demeaning of this musical. Its initial impact gave vivid illustrations of Hitler's terrifying era which no musical had ever done before. Its book and lyrics, taken from Christopher Isherwood's novel, were seriously transformed into this musical. This production focuses on the degradation of the Kit Kat Club recreating a pornographic cabaret which has created the hottest sellout ticket in town. But pornography always is a best-seller. The Playhouse theatre, now converted into the round with the chairs having table extensions as arms for several rows in the front, plus trays that are placed on the backs of other seats so the audience can eat and drink while watching the show, loses the original time and place. The Weimar Republic period not only fades away but the current times are stressed when allowing the audience to dance on stage. Seeing that kind of entertainment being made out of a show representing the upcoming danger of Nazism, revealed even in the boarding house where the American Sally Bowles lived, is a disgrace. The famous character of the Emcee who represents the outside ironic voice of escapism has been made here a participant of the club in song and dance so that the production looks more like Las Vegas instead of the degenerate **Kit** Kat club. The whole raison d'être of *Cabaret* is lost by avoiding that emphasis on the radical history of Hitler's rising days in Berlin. Unfortunately, I did not see Eddie Maynard as Emcee or Julia Beckett as Sally Bowles but found great disappointment in those leading characters as performed by Fra Fee's Emcee and Amy Lennox's Sally Bowles. Amy Lennox is an understudy who performed in the production I saw. She misjudged the essence of the character and lacked the charm of Sally Bowles' zaniness. Our sympathy for a young naive American girl enjoying her life along with her American writer as lover while singing in a cheesy cabaret in Berlin, unaware of the dangers of the times, was lost. Instead, one saw here a rather stupid character who could sing better than she could act in an irritating and willfully naive interpretation of Isherwood's Sally. Sadly, her presence was so unappealing, it disallowed any sympathy towards her naivety or unawareness of the danger of the times. Fra Free, now as the Emcee, originally the understudy, was adequate but undistinguished in his ironic characterisation. His caustic look at Hitler's Berlin and the self-deception of the Americans (which is the essence of the Emcee's impact) was not fulfilled. In the first casting of this production, Cliff, Sally Bowles' writing boyfriend, was a black actor. a plot impossibility in racist Berlin. He discreetly smuggled information between Berlin and Paris, through a German spy... not very convincing. In the current production, seeing a mixed race or middle-eastern Omar Baroud as Cliff, instead of a white American in Berlin also made no sense since a Nazi agent in Hitler's racist Berlin would never have dealt with him. An important plot point that was overlooked. Omar Baroud's charmless Cliff also lacked credibility as a writer or lover. Neither does the breakup of the lovers when Cliff decides to return to the USA break the heart. The director Rebecca Frecknall is guilty of distorting so much of the original artistry of this serious musical that conveyed so brilliantly the social terror of Hitler. The sequences in the boarding house, where the landlady and the Jewish grocer carried the angst of the times, and the tart using the boarding house as a brothel satisfying the sailors carried the fun, were out of place and completely isolated from the rest of the production. Julia Cheng's choreography kept the action floating as energy bounced all over the stage. The intent of making an entertainment out of a serious historical musical has been praised because it has been a smash hit...a sellout. But the fact that it has actually killed the importance of *Cabaret*, via its zestful Las Vegas effect, which seems to be part of the covid escapism, and also lost the danger of that historical period, is a sad comment on the whole point and purpose of the original *Cabaret*. No export. November 15/2021 – December 16/2023

LONDON COLISEUM

***MY FAIR LADY book and lyrics ALAN JAY LERNER music FREDERICK LOEWE adapted from GEORGE BERNARD SHAW'S play and GABRIEL PASCAL'S film PYGMALION director BARTLETT SHER musical director GARETH VALENTINE music supervisor TED SPERLING décor MICHAEL YEARGAN lights DONALD HOLDER costumes CATHERINE ZUBER producer JAMES L. NEDERLANDER, JAMIE WILSON, HUNTER ARNOLD, CROSSROADS LIVE, PLAYFUL PRODUCTIONS, ENGLISH NATIONAL OPERA with HARRY HADDEN-PATON professor henry higgins AMARA OKEREKE eliza doolittle, MALCOLM SINCLAIR colonel pickering, VANESSA REDGRAVE mrs higgins, STEPHEN K AMOS alfred p. doolittle, MAUREEN BEATTIE mrs pearce, SHARIF AFIFI freddy eynsford-hill, etc.

Blanche Marvin Critique

This fantastic musical which has had some of the most brilliant productions unfortunately had a mediocre rendition of this fascinating piece. It doesn't mean that one would not still participate in viewing the next new version that arrives. Enclosed are other critics' reviews.

Whats On Stage (*) Written by Alex Wood**

Watch out classic musical writing teams from the early 20th century: if you've an ampersand to your name, Bartlett Sher is going to try dragging you kicking and screaming into the modern day. Successfully managed with Rodgers and Hammerstein's South Pacific and The King and I, and shortly to take place with a freshly revived version of Lerner and Loewe's Camelot, It is the second of these duos given a fresh lick of paint in the Lincoln Center Theater revival of My Fair Lady, first seen on Broadway and now sailing into the West End. Sher's WD40-approach to what is often a rusty and cantankerous musical has gelled well in places. The story, based on George Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion, follows professor of phonetics Henry Higgins who takes working class flower girl Eliza Doolittle under his wing. His objective: to remedy her Cockney accent and regressive ways, which he sees as denigrating and dehumanising. The contemporary pertinence is hard to avoid – the patronising and privileged trying to educate the working class on how to raise themselves up out of poverty while blithely ignorant to their innate prejudices and assumptions. Two of Higgins' songs, "Why Can't the English" and "A Hymn to Him", betray his almost insufferable ignorance, the kind of morally crusading busybody concocted at the height of the British empire. His nobbiness becomes almost unsalvageable, referring to Eliza as little more than an animal, almost incapable of justifying her own existence thanks to her accent. Despite being based on Pygmalion, at times it feels more like you're watching some Victorian twist on The Little Mermaid – Eliza, once "bettered" having been robbed of her voice, her very personality, thanks to some unjust bargain made by those with ulterior motives. Those expecting a beloved tribute to Hepburn and Harrison's movie may be surprised. As isn't all that shocking, Sher brings out cracking performances from his cast: Harry Hadden-Paton, back on home soil after playing Higgins on Broadway, is aloof, flappable and flawed – like a linguistic Phileas Fogg about to embark on a lexiconic thrill ride. Vanessa Redgrave brings an ageless charisma to her scenes – pulling off a similarly irresistible charisma to Maggie Smith's dowager countess in Downton. The break-out star, as well she should be, is Amara Okereke's Eliza. Okereke's amassing a roster of cracking credits – Wendla in Spring Awakening, Cosette in Les Misérables, Laurey in Oklahoma! or Polly Brown in The Boy Friend, but this is her largest and certainly most accomplished turn. She shimmers like sunshine as she sings to the dawn in "I Could Have Danced All Night", and grounds the whole three-hour show with a faultless depiction of someone simply wanting to get ahead in the world. But it doesn't all click: despite what should be a majestic, rousing atmosphere conjured by a mammoth 40-piece orchestra, the show never really rises to match the grandeur of the Coliseum stage – the largest in the West End. A few numbers manage to land – Christopher Gattelli's bawdy choreography during "Get Me To the Church On Time" being a particular highlight. But the auditorium has an annoying tendency to swallow up what is, for large passages, essentially an intimate comedy musical between a small coterie of characters – Higgins, Eliza, wizened and amiable Colonel Pickering (an exquisite Malcolm Sinclair) and the unflappable housekeeper Mrs Pearce (Maureen Beattie – the dictionary definition of comedy foil in almost every scene). What tends to happen as a result is that the words are lost from Lerner's tricky and witty book (taking and running with the jovial musings that languish at the heart of Shaw's original Pygmalion). This is felt most keenly when the ne'er-do-well boozing, betrothing and belligerent Alfred P Doolittle (Stephen K Amos) engages in a war of wits with Higgins – wry ruminations lost as they echo across the elongated pit. It's a shame – you get the feeling that the show would flourish in a slightly smaller house. Even at a distance, admittedly, the technicolour wonder of Michael Yeargan's design, Catherine Zuber's costumes and Tom Watson's hair and wigs are clearly nothing short of a labour of love. What truly saves it, and has lingered with me since, is the defiant, almost ethereal look on Eliza's face during the closing moments of Sher's revisionist twist on the original musical's somewhat controversial ending. It's a picture of a performer who is primed to leave her mark on the theatre world. May 7-August 27/2022

DONMAR WAREHOUSE

***A DOLL'S HOUSE, PART 2 by LUCAS HATH director JAMES MACDONALD décor RAE SMITH light AZUSA ONO sound MAX PAPPENHEIM with NOMA DUMEZWENI nora, PATRICIA ALLISON emmy, BRIAN F. O'BYRNE torvald, JUNE WATSON anne marie

Blanche Marvin Review

Ibsen's Doll's House is a play about Nora who is married to the banker Torvald and has two children. Through the course of the play, she begins to realise how she is a tool of her husband's wishes and at the end is freed by slamming the door and leaving her husband and two children in order to find her own identity.

This is a follow-up of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* as written by Lucas Hnath. It is a projection into the future of what happened to Nora, the wife who left her husband and two children to seek her own identity. After much struggle, she has managed to become an important writer and has returned to Torvald's home to see her children and gain a divorce. She is welcomed by her old housekeeper, but ignored by a resentful daughter, and dismissed by an angry Torvald. There is no forgiveness or justification for Nora's leaving and so she discovers there was no coming home again in either seeing her husband or children. The door slams yet again for Nora in this refined production whose mood and theme is clearly defined. Noma Dumezweni as Nora gives a spectacular performance as the mature Nora, holding ground on varied levels. Patricia Allison as Emmy her daughter offers a fine portrait of an angry child while Brían O'Byrne conveys an emotionally damaged Torvald, and June Watson carries with such warmth the motherly housekeeper. James Macdonald's direction carries such accurate strength in the reconfigured Donmar theatre in the round and is astutely accurate in his sharp dynamics dimension of mood. The exterior and interior of the house is beautifully designed by Rae Smith to carry the mood while Azusa Ono's lights heighten the effect along with Max Pappenheim's sound effects. Export for Off Broadway June 16-August 6/2022

CURRENT

London Theatreviews sent 9 Aug/2022

CHARING CROSS

****RITA by CAETANO DONIZETTI director/orchestrator/translator ALEJANDRO BONATTO conductor MARK AUSTIN décor/costume NICOLAI HART-HANSEN lights DAVID SELDES with LAURA LOLITA PEREŠIVANA rita, BRENTON SPITERI beppe, PHIL WILCOX gasparo

Blanche Marvin Review

Every farce needs doors, at least three of them. They must be firm and strong enough to be slammed frequently and for characters to revolve or enter or exit at speed while communications are thwarted and connections "nearly missed", yet supporting the contrived coincidences. Argentinian director Alejandro Bonatto's production of Donizetti's one act comedie, un voudeilles, *Rita ou Le mari battu*, uses those doors with charming musicality allowing the comedy to subtly flow with the delightful music. His soft but comic touch has a deep sense of professional observation and charm. The story is centered on Rita whose first brutal husband drowned at sea, and who has now married a timorous second husband whom she torments. This mini comedy spoofs marriage and the roles played in matrimony. The opera, Rita, satirises the story of two men fighting over one woman. The men do not fight to win her, but rather to lose her instead. The charm of this story is its obvious comic path which is beautifully balanced in the execution and direction. It seems strange that a domestic comedy in French (later translated into Italian and here in English) with some spoken dialogue was never performed in Donizetti's lifetime. Having been turned down by Opera-Comique, Donizetti translated it into Italian and performances of this opera were staged after his death in May 1860. It was, at that time, unusual for a comedy to explore physical abuse much less bigamy and certainly not material for a farce. But Donizetti's score sparkles with joy and turns the abusive absurdity into a comic delight.

Rita's first husband, the wife-beating Gasparo, was reported as shipwrecked and drowned so she remarries Beppe whom she abuses as a means of protection. However, it turns out that Gasparo is not dead but believes that Rita died in a house fire. He's returned to find and destroy the marriage certificate so that he can marry a Canadian girl. But in finding Rita very much alive, he must change his plans. Beppe, in the meantime, sees his means of escape from violent Rita and so he joins in game playing with Gasparo where the loser wins the right to be rid of Rita. After much cheating and even abandoning a duel, Beppe gives up and reconciles himself to joining Rita. Gasparo departs, sending his fond farewell to a now happier couple. His departing advise to Beppe is, "You can beat her up but you mustn't kill her off".

The English translation, along with the charming chamber ensemble orchestration and direction by Alejandro Bonatto, is a huge accomplishment of artistry, musicality, and comedy. The simple use of three sliding doors cleverly designed by Nicolai Hart-Hansen with only a kitchen table and chair, in addition to an upstage projection of the Bergamo green sets the style instantly. The eleven-arranged Faust Chamber Orchestra conducted by Mark Austin behind the screen, offers delicious! accompany-iment to this unusual farcical opera. Laura Lolita Perešivana as Rita and Phil Wilcox are post-graduate students at Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and give substantial performances. But it is Brenton Spiteri as the beleaguered Beppe who steals the show with his professional gifts of singing and acting, thus creating such a credible character. A charming surprise at the Charing Cross Theatre. Definitely export for Off-Broadway. August 7-20/ 2022

CURRENT

London Theatreviews sent Oct 3/2022

CHARING CROSS

*THE MILK TRAIN DOESN'T STOP HERE ANYMORE by TENNESSEE WILLIAMS director ROBERT CHEVARA décor/costume NICOLAI HART-HANSEN lights ADAM KING with LINDA MARLOWE flora goforth, SARA KESTELMAN witch of capri, JOE FERRERA rudy, LUCIE SHORTHOUSE blackie, SANEE RAVAL chris flanders, MATTEO JOHNSON Giulio

Blanche Marvin Review

Tennessee Williams wrote this play about a dying Southern widow (married four times) dictating her memoirs to her secretary which included her important past social life far removed from her current isolated life on the island of Capri, where ferocious dogs stand guard against any intruders.

She spends her time on the phone, in a house set on a high mountain where only the guards keep her company. She is wasting the time of her last years, avoiding rather than facing her oncoming death. It is said that Williams wrote this play after the death of his lover Frank Merlo, which explains the symbolic character of the Angel of Death who permeates the atmosphere. The play, originally produced in 1962 in Italy, and then in 1963 there was another dud production on Broadway performed by the mighty Olympia Dukakis, in addition to Elizabeth Taylor's failed film version, rather narrow and boring in its perception. The fact that this piece has rarely succeeded did not prevent this intimate theatre from staging it. However, successful or not, the work is more of a duologue than a play and is still one of the lesser writings of Tennessee Williams. The director, Robert Chevara, has buried it rather than exhuming it from its grave. Sadly Linda Marlowe, portraying the dying character of Flora "Sissy" Goforth, is neither a typical former Southern belle nor a dying woman, as she shouts her way on the same pitch throughout the show. She abuses her assistant "Blackie" (Lucie Shorthouse) to such a degree that she deprives her of any alternative other than her defensive behaviour throughout the play. The colourless characterisations of Sissy's bodyguards, outside of Matteo Johnson playing Giulio with genuine intent, just extend unnecessary scenes. The two important characters opposing Flora are Chris Flanders (Sanee Raval) representing the Angel of Death plus the character of the Witch of Capri (Sara Kestelman) whose presence dominates the stage as the tongue-lashing dragon of a woman. Sanee Rava as the symbolic Angel of Death, tall and dark as he may be, managed a few moments of being a saddened threat, a figure known for his visitations to elderly women on the threshold of dying. It is only the appearance of Sara Kestelman whose acrid presence raises the level of the whole production with her enormous acting skills. Without her, this amateur production would have been an obvious mistake which one would have had to endure.

Tennessee Williams writes about Southern women with particular insight, seeing them as the iron fist in a velvet glove. Linda Marlowe's constant shouting eliminated that image from the entire production. It is also difficult for the audience to listen to one note. Sissy leveling her disbelief in death is the only dramatic action that the plot holds. In setting the play in Italy's Amalfi coast as she dictates her memoirs to her secretary Blackie, one learns about her four husbands and also about the undercurrent of her oncoming of death as the Angel of Death is about to arrive at any moment leading her to her resting place. Only when Flora and Christopher engage in conflict is there any depth of feeling regarding death. In complete contrast, the Witch of Capri brings life, full of caustic truths as she defies the Angel of Death in his visitations of older women. Tennessee Williams' obsession with the Angel of Death colours much of his works. But here it is a direct calling to his lover Frank Merlo who offered him the only stability in his life. Tragically, he died too soon during Williams' early career. His symbolic presence never reaches the play, which would work much better as a one-act battle between the three characters of Sissy, the Angel of Death, and the Witch of Capri. Hopefully, if this play is ever revived, it will be carefully edited before being produced. No need for export. September 26 – October 22/2022

CURRENT

London Theatreviews

CHARING CROSS

***FROM HERE TO ETERNITY novel JAMES JONES lyrics TIM RICE music STUART BRAYSON book DONALD RICE, BILL OAKES director BRETT SMOCK décor/costume STEWART J CHARLESWORTH musical director/orchestrations/new musical arrangements NICK BARSTOW choreographer CRESSIDA CARRÉ lights ADAM KING projections LOUISE RHODES-BROWN with JONNY AMIES, JONATHON BENTLEY, DESMONDA CATHABEL lorene, LEONARD COOK, KYERRON DIXON-BASSEY, SARAH DRAKE karen, DOMINIC ADAM GRIFFIN, CASSIUS HACKFORTH, ROBIN HAYWARD, CALLUM HENDERSON, JAMES MATEO-SALT, RHYS NUTTALL, JACK OFRECIO, JADEN OSHENYE, EVE POLYCARPOU Mrs kipfer, ADAM RHYS-CHARLES, CARLEY STENSON, ALAN TURKINGTON, JOSEPH VELLA

Blanche Marvin Review:

Let me first give you the outline of the story because it has been taken from James Jone's book that has been translated into an ensemble musical. The book explicitly describes the boring life of the American army on the island of Pearl Harbour in the South Pacific. It goes into detail about brutality, sexism and racism, and the idea of being outed as gay feels like the ultimate threat. In the midst of all this, the commanding officer's wife is having an affair with his top aide, and a young infantryman who is also a talented boxer arrives, determined never to take to the ring again after blinding a former opponent. There's the coldly ambitious Captain (a glowering Alan Turkington), his resentful but sensuous wife (Carley Stenson, superb), her stiffly dutiful lover (Adam Rhys-Charles), a cheeky chappie Private with a gay double life (Jonny Amies), a couple of company bullies, a pragmatic prostitute (Desmonda Cathabel) her amoral, tough-talking madam (Eve Polycarpou). Most of the storyline is transformed to the musical from the book, although a big part of the background is left out. It's gritty, grown-up stuff, but, unlike in a novel, we don't learn enough about the back stories and motivations to really invest in the people onstage. However, the musical does give you less of the storyline with its motivation and more of an ensemble work which gives you the atmosphere of the life on the island and the climactic events of the bombing by the Japanese. One cannot take all of the vast material from the book and the choice made was to give the ensemble work rather than the whole vast of the storyline from the book. Unlike South Pacific which concentrated on the characters, this musical is an epic portrayal. There's the coldly ambitious Captain (a glowering Alan Turkington), his resentful but sensuous wife (Carley Stenson, superb), her stiffly dutiful lover (Adam Rhys-Charles), a cheeky chappie Private with a gay double life (Jonny Amies), a couple of company bullies, a pragmatic

prostitute who gets the best number (impressive newcomer Desmonda Cathabel almost stops the second act with the gorgeously rueful ballad "Run Away Joe") and her amoral, tough-talking madam (Eve Polycarpou chewing the scenery with real aplomb). Jonathon Bentley gives the haunted, decent Prewitt a credible, tormented otherness, and a stratospheric belt of a singing voice. They're all recognisable "types", put over mostly with conviction and skill, but seldom sympathetic or even interesting enough to connect with.. Stuart Brayson can certainly craft a catchy tune and the score works best when the music turns bluesy or anthemic, although it's more reminiscent of the gargantuan pop operas of the 1980s and 1990s than evocative of the 1940s when the show is actually set. Nick Barstow's boisterous orchestrations hurl everything at the wall, from ukulele to slide guitar to brass to harmonica, but sometimes make the music sound almost indecently jolly in comparison to the grim stories being told. All of the singing is utterly glorious but amplified to such an extent that some of the big choral numbers come close to causing actual physical discomfort instead of the exhilaration they're presumably aiming for. Stewart J Charlesworth's palm-framed set places the audience at either end which makes for striking stage pictures when the whole company are present (the opening and closing ten minutes are authentically thrilling) but is incompatible with the 'park and bark' requirements of much of the score. Singers are constantly being forced to wander about in moments of high emotion so that both sides of the house get at least some face time: egalitarian it may be, but it's distracting and robs several ballads of their power. Adam King's highly atmospheric lighting and Cressida Carré's macho choreography work well in a space that looks exciting but ends up requiring a wearisome amount of repetition in Smock's occasionally clumsy staging.

CURRENT

London Theatre reviews

CHARING CROSS

****THE HUMAN VOICE composer FRANCIS POULENC libretto JEAN COCTEAU translator JOSEPH MACHLIS director ALEJANDRO BONATTO musical director ELSPETH WILKES décor/costume NICOLAI HART-HANSEN lights ROB HALLIDAY video CLAUDIA TOMAZ with NATALIA LEMERCIER elle, ELSPETH WILKES pianist, KELVIN GILES clarinettist

Blanche Marvin Review

The surprise of your Human Voice production was the surprise of no conclusion and the constancy of emotional turmoil that built each time in reaching a peak without any repetition. The strength of the music adds dimensions to the work, but the use of the pied piper in addition to the pianist brought in the colouring of a spiritual element, of the past, that allowed the piece to climb to another level beyond that of being self-involved. It not only held the mind but also the heart. This libretto by Jean Cocteau, music by Francis Poulenc, edited English translation by Joseph Machlis, have all enhanced the sensitive and deeply-delved direction of Alejandro Bonatto, embellished by soprano, Natalia Lemercier as Elle whose richness of tone is vocally blessed with a natural sense of drama that captures the audience. These one-act operas are a unique experience at the Charing Cross Theatre, a perfect venue with a long musical history when it was called The Players Theatre. One can now explore these mini-operas in the perfect music-hall theatre which also amazingly houses the full-scale musical. Running December 23-30/2022 The smoking of cigarettes in between the singing.

Operatic monodrama based on Cocteau's play is intimate and intricate, but underwhelming. In Francis Poulenc's 50-minute work, adapted from Jean Cocteau's 1930 monodrama *La voix Humaine*, the human voice is at once a medium of communication and a representation of psychological fragmentation. It is also at the mercy of the telephone that crosses, divides and denies connection. As the sole character, named only as Elle, begs her lover to continue their relationship, the capriciousness of the French network interrupts her laughter and lies, her pleading and rebukes. The torturous tête-à-tête becomes a fractured farewell. No wonder, when Poulenc staged the opera in 1959, Cocteau instructed that Elle should clutch the telephone "like a revolver". The intimacy of Alejandro Bonatto's production – in an English translation by Joseph Machlis – makes the telephone almost a second character, tying Elle to her lover while simultaneously tearing them apart. In the closing moments, as the telephone thread is irrevocably broken, Tomaz projects blurry images on to the silk drapes – a man's hand, a woman's face, a hazy cord that wraps around them, figuratively silencing the suicidal Elle.

The soprano sings with conviction, but a tauter, more detailed direction might garner a more gripping intensity. The musical fabric both intimates the lover's voice and embodies Elle's psyche; fittingly, pianist Elspeth Wilkes is dressed as Elle's double, rising from the sofa at the start, glass tumbler in hand, to take her seat at the grand piano at the rear. Wilkes depicts the peaks and troughs of Elle's disintegration, while also conjuring the tenderness of memory.

HAROLD PINTER

****GOOD by C.P. TAYLOR director DOMINIC COOKE décor/costume VICKI MORTIMER lights ZOE SPURR sound TOM GIBBONS musical arrangements/composition WILL STUART with DAVID TENNANT halder, ELLIOT LEVEY Maurice +, SHARON SMALL helen +, musician-actors ensemble includes Jim Creighton, Rebecca Bainbridge, Izaak Cainer, Jamie Cameron, Edie Newman, Lizzie Schenk and George Todică. Coproduced with Playful Productions

Blanche Marvin Review

C.P Taylor's 1981 play originally premiered by the RSC in 1981 at the Donmar Warehouse and then was revived at the same theatre in 1999 under Michael Grandage's direction. It now has a new production at the Harold Pinter Theatre.

This is an incisive play as it ingeniously shows the slow process and involvement of corruption in good people, who are not monsters, justifying evil actions. We watch the inevitable corruption of a man, a Frankfurt academic, who gradually becomes absorbed into the Nazi Holocaust. We are also exposed to his justifications, even as his best friend (who happens to be Jewish) is more and more threatened and who eventually finds life in Germany horrifying. Not only is this in-depth analysis of the process of change in good people brilliantly written by C.P Taylor but amazingly directed by Dominic Cooke, who makes this his debut show from his new producing company Fictionhouse Ltd. It is also superbly well-acted by David Tennant (the academic Halder), Elliot Levey (his Jewish friend Maurice), and Sharon Small (the immensely passionate Helen). Cooke's use of music and musicians is so sensitively and shockingly handled. The surprise ending where the concentration camp prisoners in uniform playing Mendelson or Schubert is a deeply-rooted shock, which emphasises the gradual conversion of this intelligent good man into the killing Gestapo officer. The balance between the abstract and the emotions, between good and evil and its slow progression, is musically woven and interpreted into the atmosphere under Dominic Cooke's sensitive hands while shocking us into reality. Vicki Mortimer's grey cell-boxed set is not only ominously frightening, but also sets the abstract style of this chilling subject. In the amazing transition at the end as we face the imprisoned musicians in uniform playing Schubert, the confined set breaks open into the concentration camp. The subtle lighting of Zoe Spurr, the integrated sound of Tom Gibbons, and the adept musical arrangements/composition of WILL Stuart add to this smoothly integrated production.

David Tennant, in the part of the Frankfurt academic Halder, is a startling actor whose soul erodes into the heartless Nazi officer in an incredible transformation. The depth of his own feelings, which he controls, towers over the part of Halder. His justifications of the character for avoiding the life-threatening tragedy of his Jewish best friend Maurice, are soul-destroying to witness. Elliot Levey as Maurice is imperceptibly adept at switching parts of the different characters, yet maintains, with skill, the main role of the Jewish Maurice. Sharon Small as Helen emotionally conveys the torture of being torn between all the alternatives.

The play is a mental journey as it reveals the gradual but predestined Nazi conversion of this Frankfurt academic who is gradually absorbed into Hitler's gas-killing era. Adding to all of this and the abstract transitions is the contrasting sweet sound of Mendelson's music. Seeing the original RSC production at the Donmar starring Alan Howard, was a terrifying experience, the first time around, but seeing those same symptoms in today's frightening era, shakes the very roots of one's being. The use of the music in contrast to this ominous play tears into the emotions as one faces those same signs repeating themselves today. One can objectively say how timely this play is, but it is the engineering of this director that has managed to trap us into its current recognition. It is a production of historic importance and will be remembered. What a launching for this new production company, particularly in this Covid period and Putin world. There is no other play being performed today that describes our era better, nor more vividly, than *Good* at the Harold Pinter Theatre. Export! Export! for Broadway. Oct 6 - December 24

SOHO PLACE THEATRE

****MARVELLOUS by NEIL BALDWIN, MALCOMBR CLARKE, THERESA HESKINS director THERESA HESKINS décor LIS EVANS lights/projection DANIELLA BEATTIE movement BEVERLEY NORRIS-EDMUNDS original sound JAMES EARLS-DAVIS london sound PAUL GROOTHUIS original musical director/composer CONRAD NELSON london composer musical director JAMES ATHERTON with SUZANNE AHMET suzanne, CHARLIE BENCE charlie, GARETH CASSIDY gareth, ALEX FROST alex, MICHAEL HUGO the real neil, JERONE MARSH-REID jerome, DANIEL MURPHYdanielproducer NEW VIC THEATRE presenter NICA BURNS founder/ producer of SohoPlace Theatre

Blanche Marvin Review

Nica Burns, founder's comment: "*Marvellous* is precisely that, marvellous. A wonderful production of a heart-warming and uplifting tale about an extraordinary man who decided he would lead an exceptional life. And against all the odds, he has and does. The New Vic in North Staffordshire, led by its brilliant director Theresa Heskins, is an absolute jewel of a regional theatre, the cultural beacon of the area and the beating heart of its community. As we open our new theatre in-the-round, we are honoured to be collaborating with and learning from the expertise of the New Vic's amazing team."

What we have in this new theatre, the SohoPlace, the first new theatre in the West End in 50 years, is not only a new theatre and a delightful show winning 4 stars from every critic, but its meaning goes far beyond the show and the building.... What we have here is the return of the revue format molded into a storyline. This delicious form of theatre was used during the Depression on Broadway in the famous revue Pins and Needles which recounted the ordeals of the women workers in the garment industry in a style of humour that still revealed the suffering, After World War II, the revue companies in London projected the trials and tribulations of the recovery period when one lived on rations and all the good products were exported. These revues gave us talented performers, musicians, singers, dancers, comedians in pertinent issues that confronted the era. Theatres like the Watergate, the Players were called music halls where the revues flourished. And then it disappeared until Marvellous which I hope has reopened the door permanently, being aided by the new adventurous spirit of a West End theatre named the SohoPlace. Its founder, Nica Burns, hasn't opened this new theatre with glittering star performers, writers or directors, but instead has transferred a hit show from the provenances. It's a unique symbol connecting the West End with the provenances and bringing into focus the wonderful work now flourishing there. This whole building is dedicated to a classless society, no longer just for the middle classes or the elite. The range of productions will vary but never its goal and so we have not only the creation of a new West End theatre with an inventively styled production from the regions, but, bigger than that, lies the deeply rooted purpose of bringing theatre into the West End that will eventually be non-profit, theatre that everyman can afford.

SohoPlace is a flexible theatre with a 602-seat auditorium, purpose built which opens in-the-round containing 2 levels of balconies with unanimously viewable sighting of the complete stage, a specially installed sound system eliminating any sounds or vibrations of the trains, ventilation keeping normal temperatures, lighting that covers the stage and auditorium in varied degrees, and trap doors as part of the stage floor that allow for scene changes. There are bars surrounded by outdoor balconies on several floors that encircle the theatre. The ground floor contains the curved-shaped restaurant with star blinking lights, the box office, and the golden staircase that leads upstairs to the theatre. The stone floors, glass walls, lepidolite columns and side walls of changing colour offer not only beauty but long clean life, thus saving the theatre from the usual wear and tear. Set between Charing Cross Road and Soho Square, the theatre entrance is on the newly named Soho Place, specially cushioned off the main roads and newly created just for the theatre as it stands between the romantic era of the past (Soho Gardens) and the aggressive newness of the present (Charing Cross Road).

MARVELLOUS...is an exuberant theatrical revue-story which conquers the heart and mind with its simple but real humour. It is placed in the reality of Staffordshire (Baldwin's hometown being Newcastle-under-Lyme), where Neil Baldwin, known as 'Nello' and now 76, was diagnosed with learning difficulties at the age of four. Baldwin boldly says, "They didn't call it that back then". But with his sense of humour and his mother's loving care, he managed to hitchhike across the country, became a famous clown, got an honorary degree from Keele University, was appointed Stoke City's legendary kit man, and even made the Queen's New Year Honours list. He also accepted a BAFTA award for the film made about his life. A local hero, friendly to all, he became an inspiration to the world as a reminder of pursuing ones dreams and making them come true. He's been publicised in a book, in a TV film starring Toby Jones, and now christening the West End's newest theatre in 50 years with this fun-driven show that even disarms the other actors in their stage-portrayal of his life. The movement whether in dance or drama is paced like a whirling dervish with music that just glides with the staging. Director Theresa Heskins has amazingly cast a 'neurodiverse troupe', who all play the different versions of Neil - under the supervision of Michael Hugo's "Real Neil" - in addition to all the figures from his life. Two understudies, Perry Moore and Joe Sproule took over on short notice for this 'big opening' and performed with such precision ...talk about nerves on opening night! The script - by Neil Baldwin, plus his friend Malcolm Clarke, and director Heskins - is linked together through individual scenes like a knitted revue. They hid none of the truths...his charm despite bullying, his happy-go-lucky disposition despite his exploitations, his losses and grief. The sense of authenticity via their accents, their reactions, and even their in-jokes which never lingers on laughs, highlights the humour. Truth is at the base of it all and the portrait of the man, his home, his city come alive because of it. By the way, the production's introduction with the Stoke players must have had greater response in Newcastle-under-Lyme. But it certainly places the location for us.

Nica Burns has carefully considered all the elements necessary for comfortable viewing in this new venue, (consideration of sight-lines, acoustics, ventilation and soundproofing in the actual construction process). She deserves the ****. The first theatre production of *Marvellous* received rave reviews across the board at the New Vic, and is a matching choice by Nica Burns for the debut production at the SohoPlace Theatre. Export in particular places.
October 21 - November 26, 2022

subSIDISED

CURRENT

London Theatreviews

ROYAL COURT

***THAT IS NOT WHO I AM by DAVE DAVIDSON director LUCY MORRISON décor NAOMI DAWSON lights ANNA WATSON sound PETER RICE video GINO GREEN producer SARAH GEORGESON with PRIYANGA BURFORD lucy kirkwood, JAKE DAVIES noah, SIENA KELLY celeste, etc.

Blanche Marvin Critique

The playwright pretended that this was not the play she was going to write but the written failed in its attempt at mystery and discovery of the truth. It was actually a rather disappointing discernment on the subject of truth. Enclosed are other critics' reviews.

Time Out (*) Written by Alice Saville**

The shocking truth about 'Dave Davidson' is revealed in the Royal Court's slippery thriller. If you haven't encountered the minor social media skirmish that accompanied the opening of this show (and good on you), here's a topline summary. 'That Is Not Who I Am' was publicised as being written by a first-time playwright apparently called 'Dave Davidson'. But people rightly suspected that it was actually authored by a big-name writer. Someone worked out who it was. The secret messily dribbled out. And people got pissed off (either because they felt the Royal Court had tricked them, or because they felt it was in poor taste to pretend to platform a newbie playwright while actually staging the work of a bankable name). Is this play good enough to overshadow all the drama? Kinda. With the caveat that what follows is full of spoilers: the author of the play presented is actually Olivier Award-winning playwright Lucy Kirkwood, who uses a wilfully tricky framing to tell the apparently 'true' story of an activist couple who try to bring down the establishment. Kirkwood appears as a character – played by Priyanga Burford – who serves as a narrator/investigator into the mystery of the couple's deaths, illicitly reconstructing their final days in defiance of a government ban on talking about the case. It starts oh-so-gradually. Noah (Jake Davies) and Celeste (Siena Kelly) meet on a blind date modelled on The Guardian's long-running series. In between begging Noah to say her table manners are excellent (after all, her mum will be reading), Celeste lets slip her theories on chemtrails – that is to say, the conspiracy theory that governments are using aircraft to spray the air with chemicals, for nefarious purposes. Noah isn't sure, but he does believe that the World Trade Centre was rigged to collapse in on itself under impact from a plane. Kirkwood's writing is ingenious and subtle, showing how this couple gradually urge each other deeper into anti-establishment fervour, like they're tiptoeing cautiously into a freezing sea. Davies and Kelly have a winning chemistry, their physical passion for each other glueing them together even as their lives come unstuck during the isolation of Covid. Still, it's not quite enough to make this paranoid pair entertaining company for this play's one-hour 45-minute running time. This play is billed as a thriller, but the fact that we know how their anti-surveillance, anti-government mission is going to end means it often feels ponderous rather than tense. And whereas Lucy Prebble's brilliant 2019 play 'A Very Expensive Poison' managed to mingle larky metatheatrical form with serious political themes, here, the tone feels subtly off: simultaneously not quite dark enough to thrill, and not quite silly enough to be laugh-out-loud funny. What does make Kirkwood's play exciting is its unsettling, nihilistic anti-establishment message. It shows how inescapable tech surveillance has become, and how government agents embed themselves deep into any movement that threatens the status quo (as the real-life 'spy cops' scandal has shown). Does it feel dangerous enough to be something that would plausibly be censored by the government? No. But it's an intriguing experiment that shows the all-too-real obstacles to making radical change. 10 June-16 July 2022

Guardian (**) Written by Kate Wyver**

Lift up the cover of the playtext for That Is Not Who I Am by Dave Davidson and another play will fall out. Long before the audience have stepped into the Royal Court, this play has us questioning the truth. The real play, that is. That Is Not Who I Am is a clever front for Rapture, a brilliantly tricky new production by Lucy Kirkwood. In an opening statement, we are told that Rapture is a response to a real-life investigation of a murdered couple, after the home secretary refused to release the report on their deaths. After legal challenges and threats, Kirkwood decided to publish the play under a pseudonym for her own safety. Directed slickly by Lucy Morrison, an immediate sense of discomfort is sewn into this remarkably layered, brain-boggling story, in which reality and sanity are under constant scrutiny. Celeste (Siena Kelly) and Noah (Jake Davies) meet on a Guardian blind date, rating each other 9 and 9.5. As they create a life together, his resistance to technology rubs off on her, and among the fragile scenes of their relationship, we see them grow increasingly paranoid of surveillance and data collection. A relentless urgency builds as they become entangled in anti-democracy movements and the hoarding of government secrets, making themselves into dangerous targets. They are right to think they are being watched, and not just by us and their Netflix subscription. Leaning casually against Naomi Dawson's rotating, scaffold-home set is Kirkwood. Played with a nervous excitement by Priyanga Burford, she explains how she used Reddit threads, YouTube videos and home recordings to piece the Quilter's story together – the technology the couple hated forming her archive. Conspiracy theories come to the fore, and the question of what is real suddenly seems very difficult to answer. Rapture is about truth and power, with a visceral frustration at our cruel and incompetent government being just one of the many intricate layers of this mystery. But in text and direction, this play also delights in the way theatre is made, with visible stage managers constructing the version of reality Kirkwood wants us to believe. A heady production with stellar performances, Rapture is a thriller, a trickster, and an absolute romp.

CURRENT

London Theatreviews sent Nov 5/2022

ROYAL COURT

***NOT ONE OF THESE PEOPLE by MARTIN CRIMP director, designer CHRISTIAN LAPOINTE lights CAROLINE ROSS creative developer GUILLAUME LEVESQUE sound, technical director GABRIEL FILIATREULT with MARTIN CRIMP

Blanche Marvin Review

Martin Crimp's presentation is not a play, nor a lecture, but actually an experiment using AI and deep-fake technology to question the definition of drama while analysing what it is, or means, to be human. Martin Crimp's inquiry moves circles within circles in a non-dramatic format. He is exploring, questioning, futurising the essence of storytelling or general authorship, whether its reality or theatre scripting, exposing, or analysing the means of production within the storytelling itself. He is attempting to reveal the mechanics of how a story is created, who enacts it, and if there is communication between the presentation and the audience. *Not One of These People* is directed and designed by Christian Lapointe and performed by Crimp himself, who appears live behind a desk, or in front of a mike, and at times just on film surrounded by a screen and camera equipment – as if being streamed directly on line. Deep-fake technology is what is used for whatever purpose, but it does animate approximately 300 photographed and unreal faces on the screen, created by artificial intelligence who speak. Some of images are accompanied by a male voiceover – some of which is Crimp, who saunters on and off stage, reading from a script. Then technology maps Crimp's voice and facial movements on to their image. The focus and point of this creation is centred on authorship and author. Static pictures emerge from nowhere and the playwright is then unveiled like a technological puppet-master pulling strings. Those faces constantly make serious or trivial comments about the world or just personal remarks whether regarding race or sex, secret confessions or political declarations, love or hate, violence or passion, identity or its loss. The range from humour to shock is deliberate as points of stories resist any cohesive narrative. In the last sequence, Crimp is behind a transparent screen in a study of sorts, reading, writing, listening to music, while the faces keep speaking as fictional voices in his head. Points are made, even dramatised, but without much depth or development, which eventually feels hypnotic but without meaning. One questions if it's a film or a form of new theatre? Though staged in a theatrical space, it is also meta-theatre, centered on the concept of a story while revealing the playwright's vision of its staging. But the big question concerns itself over the characters and their "humanness". Are thoughts and partial experiences being expressed by machines despite sounding and even feeling human? However, Crimp only hints at all of this and actually explores the surface of a development yet to come. It is not an emotional experience but rather a cerebral one....an experiment that only suggests but does not conclude. We are entering this new era which offers very personal choices. Stars ***mean nothing as it is only my reaction. All I can do is explain the piece.... In style, it's like a video installation at the Tate on a perpetual loop, in a repetition which does not even try to hide the fact that it is conceptual, deconstructive, cerebral and yes, undramatic. Maybe export? November 3 -5/ 2022 ...1½ hours no interval

CURRENT

London Theatreviews

YOUNG VIC

**OKLAHOMA by RODGERS & HAMMERSTEIN director DANIEL FISH, JORDAN FEIN music RICHARD RODGERS book/lyrics OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN II choreographer JOHN HEGINBOTHAM décor LAEL JELLINEK, GRACE LAUBACHER costume TERESE WADDEN lights SCOTT ZIELINSKI music supervision DANIEL KLUGER, NATHAN KOCI musical director HUW EVANS orchestral manager DAVID GALLAGHER with ARTHUR DARVILL curly mclain, JAMES DAVID will parker, STAVROS DEMETRAKI ali hakim, ANOUSHKA LUCAS laurey williams, LIZA SADOVY aunt eller, PATRICK VAILL jud fry, MARISHA WALLACE ado annie, etc.

Blanche Marvin Critique

Trying to relocate the essence of the piece is a mistake in recreating this wonderfully cheerful story of the great battle between the farmer and the cattle grazer. To re-interpret its basic premise is not to appreciate the full glory of the piece. Enclosed are other critics' reviews.

Guardian (****) Written by Miriam Gillinson

This modern, sexy and unsettling show injects thrills into a familiar musical, making it feel newly minted. How to rewrite Rodgers and Hammerstein's classic musical without changing a word? It turns out all you need do is make us really watch, and really listen. In immersing the audience in the action (with some spectators sat at stage-side tables) and highlighting tricky scenes and characters that are often hastily brushed over, directors Daniel Fish and Jordan Fein have created a modern, sexy and unsettling show. And as for the music? The score sounds so revitalised it might've been written yesterday. with the lights on full glare and the modern-dressed ensemble cast sat on stage throughout, there's the livewire feeling of a read-through, as if the actors are approaching the book and music for the very first time. Nothing is sacred. Everything is up for grabs. The physicality and proximity of this production make us think about the show differently. During the big ensemble numbers, it's possible to turn your head and tune into a different song line. It's our choice, it seems, whom we listen to. At the end of the showpiece numbers, you can hear the actors panting. Everything that is beautiful comes at a cost. Arthur Darvill and Anoushka Lucas are both talented musicians and it's when they sing that their characters – young Laurey Williams and cowboy Curly McLain – come alive. But it's the supporting roles that make the strongest impression. Marisha Wallace electrifies as the frisky Ado Annie, who she transforms with her huge voice and commanding presence from a comedy sidekick into something much more savvy and meaningful. Patrick Vaill compels as outsider Jud Fry – more melancholy than menacing. Pore Jud is Daid is performed in pitch black with Vaill's face filmed, projected and magnified across the back wall. It's a haunting sight, and as his huge eyes flicker and wince there's something in his filmed despair that very subtly brings to mind cyberbullying. It doesn't all work and there are moments, particularly during the second half and its rejigged and highly stylised ending, when the innovations risk causing distraction. But this is still a brave and invigorating show that effortlessly unearths the ugliness that has always glimmered beneath Oklahoma!'s beautiful morning. April 26-June 25

Evening Standard (**) Written by Nick Curtis**

This thrilling, Tony-award winning New York production strips Rodgers and Hammerstein's first musical collaboration, a frontier romance set in 1906, back to its essence. Gone is the thumbs-in belt-loops, hoedown hokiness of previous, prettified versions, in favour of a pared-down aesthetic. A mixed-heritage cast in modern-ish costumes share a starkly-lit plywood set - suggesting a dancehall but ringed with rifles - with both the band and the audience. Some idiot culture-warrior will doubtless call it WOKE-lahoma which is a) stupid, given that native Americans are still airbrushed out of the story and b) spoiled as a joke now, because I made it first. Arthur Darvill's cocky cowboy Curly still finds a complicated path to the heart of Anoushka Lucas's vibrantly sensual farmgirl Laurey. The big numbers - Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin'; I Cain't Say No; People Will Say We're In Love - still come across beautifully. But the themes of awkward young love, poisonous jealousy, exuberant celebration and the hard pragmatism of forging a new state are thrown into sharp relief. The score is rigorously interrogated by orchestrator Daniel Kluger and sounds utterly fresh: some songs are begun or fully sung unaccompanied, and there's slide guitar and banjo alongside plangent strings. John Heginbotham's choreography has a savage, stamping, heedless edge, particularly in his reworking of Laurey's dream sequence for a lone, barefoot dancer, Marie-Astrid Mence, wearing a shimmering t-shirt. Some scenes are filmed, extreme close-ups of faces projected live over the simplistic painting of a prairie homestead on the back wall. Overall, it's a stunning reinvention by directors Daniel Fish and Jordan Fein, although their radicalism very occasionally feels laboured. Similarly, Terese Wadden's costumes skilfully blend modern attire and 70s Western pastiche garb, until the big dance scene, where she puts the women in hideous mini-crinis, that'd be laughed off the floor of most modern line-dancing clubs. Anyway, here, the sullen, sneery, indifference that Curly and Laurey show to each other has a clear erotic edge. Laurey's other admirer, creepy farmhand Jud, is mesmerizingly played as a wet-eyed incel by Patrick Vaill, from the original NY cast. Curly's taunting of Jud, and Jud's attempt to woo Laurey, begin in complete, sinister darkness. There's a clear sense here that women are rated for their financial value or erotic capital: Lucas's Laurey seems to burn with the injustice of it. Comic relief comes from Liza Sadovy, clearly basking in the plaudits from her award-winning turn in Cabaret, as Laurey's straight-talking Aunt Eller. And from big-voiced, hilarious Marisha Wallace as heedless sex-magnet Ado Annie, keeping two men on a string. James Davis, also from the original NY production, is great as the dim, devoted Will Parker, while Stavros Demetraki is a picture of desperation as the peddler Ali Hakim, trying to escape entanglement. The stark ending is powerful, if a little forced. I still can't totally get my head around a musical where the titular anthem insists that a fairly boring US state is "ok" and "doing fine". But this Oklahoma! has an urgency and zest that beats any other version I've seen, including the 1998 National Theatre revival that featured Hugh Jackman as Curly.

CURRENT

London Theatreviews

YOUNG VIC

***THE COLLABORATION by ANTHONY MCCARTEN director KWAME KWEI-ARMAH décor/costume ANNA FLEISCHLE lights MARK HENDERSON sound EMMA LAXTON projections DUNCAN MCLEAN with SOFIA BARCLAY, PAUL BETTANY, ALEC NEWMAN and JEREMY POPE

Blanche Marvin Critique

This was an interesting insight into the relationship of Andy Warhol in his period of incandescence. An interesting production of a novel artist. Enclosed are other critics' reviews.

Guardian (*) Written by Arifa Akbar**

Paul Bettany and Jeremy Pope excel as the art world legends in Anthony McCarten's account of a fractious friendship. Anthony McCarten's new play is an odd bromance between two art world legends, Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat. Like McCarten's *The Pope* (adapted into the Oscar-nominated film *The Two Popes*), it is based on real-life figures at ideological odds, this time in a more volatile head-to-head. Warhol recently popped up, as a familiar figure in a fright wig, in James Graham's 1960s political drama *Best of Enemies* at the Young Vic. He is back on the same stage now, played by Paul Bettany in the actor's first theatrical appearance for more than 20 years. The story is set in the 1980s when the middle-aged pop artist and the spirited young painter collaborated on a series of works, their partnership pitched as a boxing match in its marketing poster. "He's old hat," says Jeremy Pope's Basquiat. His paintings are "so ugly and angry," says Bettany's Warhol. Yet they are persuaded to come together, this play dramatising their first day in the studio and what appears to be their last. An ebullient production under Kwame Kwei-Armah's direction (there is even a live DJ though, oddly, the music is only cranked up in between scenes), it has two star turns in the central performances and a spectacular set from Anna Fleischle: paint-splattered floorboards and white brick walls which recreate the look of a loft studio. Duncan McLean's magnificent projections conjure the New York skyline on semi-diaphanous panels. The friendship between the artists is a fascinating one - far spikier than in Julian Schnabel's 1996 biopic *Basquiat* - but it does not have the same quietly cumulative force as that in *The Two Popes*. The first half is stilted - deliberately so - but feels a little slow and static, the artists talking about the purpose of art and the meanings it holds for them. Much of this feels overfamiliar, especially Warhol's soup tins, the commodification of art and his vision of the artist as a brand. None of it feels mined deeply enough, and exposition glares through at times: Warhol makes a quip about the shooting that nearly killed him; Basquiat tells us what his former graffiti tag, *Samo*, stood for. The conversation feels as familiar as the Marilyn Monroe silk-screens that hang at the back of the room and seems to tiptoe around points of conflict rather than going in with both feet. The second half is far more animated with intellectual arguments running alongside the human drama of their jagged friendship. There are several arresting moments, with a shocking plotline about a Black street artist beaten into a coma by police officers which also refers back to Basquiat's identity as a Black American of Puerto Rican and Haitian heritage. The gulf between the

first and second acts feels wide, though, and we wish for a smoother arc between the two, which might fill us in on the formation of the intense relationship we see at the end. There are gusts of rage, accusation and mistrust between them, the emotional volatility of the second act all the louder against the quiet of the first. Warhol's objectification of Basquiat is powerfully conveyed, with all the racialised overtones – he speaks of him as a Haitian immigrant ("No, I'm an American," says Basquiat), and calls his works "primal" ("Do you mean like a primate?" shoots back Basquiat in a line spoken in Schnabel's biopic but better explored here). Bettany and Pope do so much more than merely ventriloquising their celebrity parts. Bettany captures Warhol's tics – his gawkiness and gormless stares with a deadpan streak of cynicism. He is a far more rounded character than David Bowie's amusingly eccentric Warhol in Schnabel's film and steers clear of caricature but certainly brings humour. Pope, meanwhile, gives us a seductive, childlike free spirit in his Basquiat but remains – maybe deliberately – more of an enigma. Their collaboration is very much a story for our age of Twitter battles and irreconcilable ideological differences. Despite their charged rows, they do not stop talking or working together, and the final, touching, portrait of them is one of love. 16 Feb – 2 Apr 2022

CURRENT

London Theatreviews

YOUNG VIC

**MANDELA music/lyrics GREG DEAN BOROWSKY, SHAUN BOROWSKY book LAIONA MICHELLE director SCHELE WILLIAMS choreographer GREGORY MAQOMA additional music/lyrics BONGI DUMA décor HANNAH BEACHLER costume FAY FULLERTON lights JON CLARK sound PAUL GATEHOUSE projection/video AKHILA KRISHNAN orchestrator SAM YOUNG musical supervisor BENJAMIN KWASI BURRELL musical director SEAN MAYES with GREGORY ARMAND, ZION BATTLES, EARL CARPENTER, STEWART CLARKE, HANNA DIMTSU, DANIELLE FIAMANYA, LERATO GWEBU, PRUDENCE JEZILE, AKMED JUNIOR KHEMALAI, SEAN KINGSLEY, MICHAEL LUWOYE, BLUE MAKWANA, KAYLEIGH MCKNIGHT, POSI MORAKINYO, SNEZIEY MSOMI, NOMFUSI NGONYAMA, RYAN O'DONNELL, ADAM PEARCE, BOTLHALE PHORA, SHIV RABHERU, WILL RICHARDSON, LEANNE ROBINSON and NTSIKELELO NICHOLAS VANI

Blanche Marvin Critique

Sad attempt at a portrayal of a great man. Enclosed are other critics' reviews.

Guardian (***) Written by Arifa Akbar

This musical about the extraordinary life of the South African freedom-fighter turned statesman promises so much. Backed by members of his family, it is led by Broadway talent including Michael Luwoye in the lead role and director Schele Williams. And it begins powerfully, with the Sharpeville massacre of 1960 when peaceful protest was brutally ended by machine gunfire and dozens of deaths. But for a two-and-a-half-hour production it is astonishing how little we learn about the main players, from Madiba to the African National Congress colleagues who surrounded him, as well as Winnie Mandela and their children. Instead it offers a vague and sentimental sweep of his life, focusing on his prison years on Robben Island. There is a minimal book by Laiona Michelle that speaks in slogans and brings little dramatic tension, with cursory or shallow exchanges between characters. Some of the music by South African songwriters Greg Dean Borowsky and Shaun Borowsky is rousing, especially when accompanied by the dancing ensemble who bring some energy. But more often the songs are syrupy, ponderous and inert. We find out nothing about Mandela's background – meeting Winnie, training in law, his path into ANC activism or his Marxist brand of socialism. Mandela speaks of fighting fire with fire but there is little insight or detail beyond these banner words and phrases, which come to sound like fridge magnet philosophy. "No talking politics," barks the guard at Robben Island when Winnie visits Mandela, and this seems like a policy for the musical too. We get brief glimpses into the life of Winnie (Danielle Fiamanya) but the controversies around her leadership – alleged violence and corruption – are broached in one song and swiftly put away. As a family story, there is a moving scene when Mandela is prevented from going to the funeral of his son who has been killed in a car crash, but more often scenes with his children are filled with sugar and schmaltz, Mandela's daughters dreaming of their tall, dark, handsome daddy, his sons joshing or sparring with him. The central performances are as strong as they can be given the material, and both Fiamanya and Luwoye's voices brim with power, as do those of the chorus. But that is simply not enough and this feels like a thoroughly missed opportunity. 29 Nov 2022 – 4 Feb 2023

CURRENT

London Theatreviews

BARBICAN

****ANYTHING GOES music/lyrics COLE PORTER based on books by P.G.WODEHOUSE & GUY BOLTON and HOWARD LINDSAY & RUSSEL CROUSE and TIMOTHY CROUSE & JOHN WEIDMAN director/choreographer KATHLEEN MARSHALL musical supervisor/director STEPHEN RIDLEY décor DEREK McLANE costume JON MORRELL lights HUGH VANSTONE sound JONATHAN DEANS producer EILENE DAVIDSON PRODUCTIONS, BOOKMYSHOW, RUPERT GAVIN & MALLORY FACTOR, etc. with SUTTON FOSTER reno sweeney, ROBERT LINDSAY moonface martin, FELICITY KENDAL mrs evangeline harcourt, GARY WILMOT elisha whitney, SAMUEL EDWARDS billy crocker, CARLY MERCEDES DYER erma, etc.

Blanche Marvin Critique

Delightful production of an uplifting show beautifully produced. Enclosed are other critics' reviews.

Time Out (****) Written by Andrzej Lukowski

This sublime revival of the classic musical returns for 2022. 'Anything Goes' returns for 2022, with an all-new cast, headed up by Kerry Ellis as Reno Sweeney, Denis Lawson as Moonface Martin, Simon Callow as Elisha Whitney and Bonnie Langford as Evangeline Harcourt. This review is from 2021, of the production's original UK cast. We should cherish musicals like 'Anything Goes' for lots of reasons. But a big one is that I don't think anyone would write it today: its mixture of timeless songs, virtuosic wit and an offhandedly back-of-a-fag-packet book speaks of a different age when nobody much cared what musicals were *about* just so long as the talent was there. And what talent! Based around songs by the great Cole Porter, it has a book by PG Wodehouse and Guy Bolton that ended up being drastically rewritten by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse for reasons that seem historically disputed. Not that anyone seems to mind because 'Anything Goes' has proven to be a whopping big hit that's been merrily tinkered with over the years: one of its biggest numbers, the peerless Porter standard 'It's De-Lovely', wasn't even added until 1962, 28 years after the musical premiered. You can see why its flimsiness has proved so enduring: just as 'Anything Goes' cheered up audiences in the 1930s – which, lest we forget, were awful – so it's undoubtedly a tonic for our gloomy times. This was my first time back in a capacity theatre since last March, and the first time since then that I've been in an audience that wasn't mostly masked. I am very much on the fence as to whether this is a sane idea. But you couldn't ask for a more pleasurable way to ease back into notional normality than with this gloriously daft romcom about some horny people on a boat. The plot is so negligible it barely needs to be addressed (boat. Horny people. Okay?) but the engine of the story is the burgeoning romance between dishy young stockbroker Billy Crocker (Samuel Edwards) and sweet debutante Hope Harcourt (Nicole-Lily Baisden), who is unfortunately engaged to barking mad Englishman Lord Evelyn Oakleigh (Haydn Oakley), with all three of them stuck together on a luxury transatlantic cruise liner heading from New York to London. They're likeable young things, but if you take any more than a passing interest in what happens to them then you're doing it wrong. The 'point' of 'Anything Goes' is the notionally more peripheral characters, particularly the sassy evangelist-turned-singer Reno Sweeney, who is the show's lead by default because she gets all the big numbers. And imported Broadway star Sutton Foster effortlessly steals every scene as Reno with a devastating mix of raw talent – she is very much the proverbial triple-threat – and sheer, gutbusting effort. Plus she's very funny, aided by some smart interventions made by director and choreographer Kathleen Marshall – reprising her slick 2011 Broadway production – that up Reno's knowingness: Foster's arsenal of fourth-wall-breaking smirks, eyerolls and sighs provide virtual running commentary on the rest of the action. The climactic first-half title number and her big second half medley 'Blow, Gabriel, Blow' are just astounding, life-affirming eruptions of the raw, visceral power of musical theatre as a craft. Yes, Foster has plenty of support from the ensemble, notably in the sublime mass tap-off at the end of 'Anything Goes' (the song). But she's at the thick of it each time, leading the troops like some spangly general of old – the precision, the talent, the sheer *effort* is just jaw-dropping, even as Reno remains a relentlessly breezy character. It's a veritably Olympian performance. Veteran Brit Robert Lindsay can't really hope to keep up with her (the man's 71 for chrissakes) but he offers her a terrific comic foil as shambolic second-tier gangster Moonface Martin, who has snuck on board the ship for Reasons, and essentially spends the show threatening to do something terrible to somebody with a machine gun, while remaining relentlessly cuddly. Wilfully dysfunctional and ad-libbing all over the shop, Lindsay has a very entertaining duet with Reno ('Friendship') in which he mostly tries to get Foster to corpse, which is genuinely great fun. In a show that has no functional plot but more characters than a season of 'Game of Thrones', there's also fun supporting work from Gary Wilmot as Billy's boomerangingly idiotic boss Elisha. Felicity Kendall raises a smile as Hope's self-absorbed, status-obsessed mum. And Carly Mercedes Dyer is entertaining as Moonface's acquaintance Erma, squeaky-voiced and fabulous as the horniest of all the horny people on the horny boat. They don't make 'em like this anymore – and even if they did, the massive cast and sumptuous orchestra still feel like an astonishing luxury anomaly in pingtastic 2021. But it feels fresh: the only thing to prompt a real eyebrow-raise in 2021 is the late number 'The Gypsy in Me' – it's basically harmless, but I don't think anyone would write it today. All in all, Marshall's revival of 'Anything Goes' mirrors the cruise it depicts: it doesn't really go anywhere, but the journey is utterly ravishing and your crew is out of this world. July 15-September 3

CURRENT

London Theatreviews

BARBICAN

****AGE OF RAGE by INTERNATIONAL THEATER AMSTERDAM after EURIPIDES, AESCHYLUS director IVO VAN HOVE translation GERARD KOOLSCHIJN adaptor IVO VAN HOVE, KOEN TACHELET choreography WIM VANDEKEYBUS décor/light JAN VERSWEYVELD costume AN D'HUYS music/sound design ERIC SLEICHIM draamturgy KOEN TACHELET with ACHRAF KOUTET, AUS GREIDANUS JR., CHRIS NIETVELT, GIJS SCHOLTEN VAN ASCHAT, HANS KESTING, HÉLÈNE DEVOS, ILKE PADDENBURG, JANNI GOSLINGA, JESSE MENSAH, MAARTEN HEIJMANS, MINNE KOOLE, MARIA KRAAKMAN, etc.

Blanche Marvin Critique

A fiery production of a fiery theme brilliantly conceived and produced. Exciting in a rousing of curiosity and outrage. Enclosed are other critics' reviews.

Guardian (*****) Written by Arifa Akbar

While the emotional complexities remain, Ivo van Hove's high-octane makeover featuring unrelenting pyrotechnics and riveting performances is a visual epic. The fires are being stoked even before Age of Rage has started. Flames are fanned at the back of the stage while a gauzy screen with a luminous family tree flashes the names of ancient gods and royals. Zeus. Agamemnon. Tantalus. Clytemnestra. They zoom toward us like the opening credits for an action-packed movie. Ivo van Hove's makeover of ancient Greek tragedy, combining stories by Euripides and Aeschylus and produced by Internationaal Theater Amsterdam, turns out to be every bit as high-octane as these initial optics suggest. Age of Rage is not without its failings; at almost four hours long it is wildly messy, with some

clunky elements in the text (adapted by Koen Tachelet and Van Hove, translated from Dutch to English by Gerard Koolschijn). But it brings ancient Greek tragedy exploding into our times. The story, featuring the fall of Troy and the house of Atreus, shows how the curse of war, the addictions of anger and revenge, the trappings of power and the abnegation of blame are still with us, all these centuries on. The characters look small and insignificant as Agamemnon (Hans Kesting) and Menelaus (Gijs Scholten van Aschat) emerge in contemporary clothing (baggy trousers and tops) and Clytemnestra (Chris Nietvelt) saunters on in a sequined dress and stiletto boots. It all feels tame until the sacrifice of Iphigenia (Ilke Paddenburg) – to which Agamemnon agrees in exchange for progress in Greece's war against Troy. Her throat slit, Iphigenia is turned into a dangling dead animal. The theatrical pyrotechnics do not let up from hereon in. Sometimes it feels as if we are at an unnervingly bloody rock concert, other times a grungy death metal club. Visually it is epic and elemental, with the flames at the back and earth at the front, along with the sound of water off stage. There are thunderous strains of music by the collective BL!NDMAN complete with distorted vocals rising in moments of violence, and an almost constant throb of percussion, including a blacksmith's wheel played with a knife. A smell of burning rises off Jan Versweyveld's stunning set. Lights flash, smoke machines work from above and below, and a chorus of dancers thrash their limbs and stick out their tongues, half-human, half-animal (choreography by Wim Vandekeybus). The dead are wrapped in shrouds and lifted off the stage like parcelled meat or images from a Francis Bacon canvas, with buckets of blood poured from the rafters. What stops it from feeling queasily glamorised in its violence is the depth of emotion. There is a specific focus on women's tragedy within war. Men such as Agamemnon blame their violence on bigger forces: "We are slaves to the masses," he says, speaking of the power of the people, of the oracle revealing Iphigenia's sacrifice and of the gods, all the while absolving himself of blame. Some of the violence is sexualised, from the cutting of a penis to a sword piercing a vagina, but this savagery, more than ever now, feels like an appalling fact of war. Women and children are shown to suffer, abjectly and graphically. Daughters who are sacrificed look impossibly young and innocent. Even more powerful is the mourning of mothers on both sides of the Greek and Trojan divide. The grief of Janni Goslinga's Hecuba is immense as her daughter Cassandra (Maria Kraakman) is made Agamemnon's concubine, while Polyxena and Polydorus (both Ilke Paddenburg) are killed. We see Hecuba crying protractedly over their disfigured bodies. We see her anger, too, that burns as hot as the flames on stage. Clytemnestra and Helena are both played by Nietvelt in a sensational double performance, while Goslinga is every bit as riveting. The show makes immense demands on its performers who deliver with unfaltering energy. If these ancient stories look simplified and cinematic here, their emotional and psychological complexities remain: we hear of Agamemnon's uncertainty over sacrificing Iphigenia and the chilling psychology of martyrdom as she gives herself over. Later Clytemnestra's intentions behind murdering Agamemnon are unpicked by her daughter, Elektra (Hélène Devos), and she and Orestes (Minne Koole) emerge as self-appointed, self-righteous moral agents, petulant in their tone, just as vengeful as their forefathers and deranged with bloodlust. Where order is traditionally restored in the final story of Orestes with the appearance of Apollo, here the god looks almost cartoonish and his invocation to let grudges go seems deliberately pat. We end with a doom-laden song, more crashing metal sounds, and it is clear in Van Hove's ancient Greece that the cycles of war, violence and revenge simply go on and on. 5-8 May

CURRENT

London Theatre reviews sent Nov 4/2022

BARBICAN

****MY NEIGHBOUR TOTORO after HAYAO MIYAZAKI composer JOE HISAISHI adapter TOM MORTON-SMITH director PHELM MCDERMOTT puppetry BASIL TWIST costume KIMIE NAKANO lights JESSICA HUNG HAN YUN orchestrator/arranger WILL STUART sound TONY GAYLE movement YOU-RI YAMANAKA video FINN ROSS, ANDREA SCOTT music supervisor BRUCE O'NEIL with AMI OKUMURA JONES daughter satsuki, MEI MAC younger daughter mei, DAI TABUCHI father tatsuo, KANAKO NAKANO mother tsukiko, JACQUELINE TATE granny, AI NINOMIYA singer, NINO FARUHATA kanta/puppeteer, SUSAN MOMOKO HINGLEY miss hara/puppeteer, HARUKA KURODA nurse emiko/puppeteer, etc.... all the puppets are animations

Blanche Marvin Review

My Neighbour Totoro, a Japanese film where its classic puppetry and music are true to its origins in classic 2-D animation, has been transformed by the RSC into live theatre using live puppets and actors on stage at the Barbican. This 1988 Studio Ghibli film, has had the status of whimsical-Japanese animé for a generation of Japanese children and now this fanciful stage version is an absolute treat for adults and children alike in the UK. Using a unique combination of the traditional Japanese puppetry and contemporary live action, it transposes Hayao Miyazaki's fantastical film creatures to the stage. The RSC has achieved all of this with style and wonderment from the opening, where a clever riff on the movie's title wittily transports the audience from a flat screen to the stage's three-dimensional world. We meet Satsuki, Mei and their father coasting in a tiny truck piled high with their possessions. The mother is ill in a rural convalescent hospital so the family move from the city to the country to be nearby her. The girls are thrilled in their new home, an old wooden house with a pump for water and fresh air. The frightening soot insects, black feathery balls made to fly by the puppeteers, soon stop disturbing them. The neighbours, local rice farmers and granny, plus the nearby woods are friendly people and places to explore. While Satsuki is at school, four-year-old Mei discovers the forest spirits, two small Totoros mockingly checking out the house and the new tenants. Furry creatures again operated by puppeteers in black Japanese outfits and veils manipulate these creatures, typical of the Bunraku puppetry. We come eventually to meet the real Totoro, a gigantic, furry monster, asleep in the forest....an ancient creature, whose roar rises from a full-tooth cavity of a mouth and wagging tongue, and who can shake the earth with that toothsome wagging roar. He's an odd mix of bear, cat, rabbit and owl. who can fly yet is unwieldy in movement and puzzled by rain. (a pop-culture cuddly icon since 1988) BUT when Mei climbs on to his tummy, he mellows and melts with pleasure like the good-natured creature that he is. Throughout the show the enchanting choreographed puppeteers

manipulating these intriguing subjects designed by the Jim Henson company, are the joy of the evening. Add to the giant Totoro, the marvellously captured Catbus – a 12-legged animal that can also fly through the air like a gigantically lighted lantern, with piercing eyes as it transports the children from the countryside to their mother in hospital. The story continues with the girls eventually joined by their mother and father accompanied by the spirited Totoro. Words of advice about respecting nature, about man's exploitation of the countryside causing the forest spirits to hide ...is the moral of the story.

The combined use of the actor with the animated creatures is a unique art of live action and animation that is a stunning combination to behold. And what an inspiration it is to witness Mei Mac as an impulsive four-year-old who both creates the ups and downs for her responsible big sister, played so winningly by Ami Okumura Jones. Dai Tabuchi is a charmer as the absent-minded professor father, Dai Kanako is warming as the sick mother, and Nino Furumata offers the awkwardness of the local boy. Following the movie's original and suggestive narrative, the storyline is thin but, overall, the winning charm of the production is influenced by its ingeniously everchanging and evolved staging. The crafted sets are a delicate combination of suggestive animation and stagecraft. Lighting and props like roadside statues, shrines, or deities that shift the landscapes are achieved via the choreographed movements of the Shinto figures, an anonymous legion of black-clad puppeteers who also double, triple and quadruple from engineering Totoro to the flocks of 'dust sprites' that inhabit the girls' new house, to even a group of wobbly chickens. Director Phelim McDermott has collaborated with the film's original composer Joe Hisaishi in extending the role music in the stage adaptation... there's the theme with more of atmospheric sound-tracking added to it. Musicians play live on tree-house platforms, while Ai Ninomiya sings enchantingly in both Japanese and English. *My Neighbour Totoro* is an inventive show, a hit for both the RSC and the Barbican. As 10-year-old Satsuki, said when she arrives in the countryside with her little sister Mei, "We're not in Tokyo anymore..." but how enchantingly they carry us into the Japanese countryside and its imagined creatures. Yes, this a wide export and a huge winner for the RSC, outmatching *Matilda*. November 4 – January 21/2023

CURRENT

London Theatreviews

LYRIC HAMMERSMITH

**SCANDALTOWN by MIKE BARTLETT director RACHEL O'RIORDAN décor GOOD TEETH costume KINNETIA ISIDORE lights PAUL KEOGAN composer SIMON SLATER with PHOEBE VIRTUE cecilia appiah, MATTHEW BROOME jack virtue, EMMA CUNNIFFE aunty julie, rachel de souza, HENRY EVERETT peter media obe, carson, RICHARD GOULDING matt eton, LUKE HORNSBY freddie peripheral, THOMAS JOSLING tom double-budget, AYSHA KALA Hannah tweetwell, ANNETTE MCLAUGHLIN rosaling double-budget, AMI OKUMURA JONES jenny hood, CHUKWUMA OMAMBALA sir dennis hedge, kevin the postman, RACHAEL STIRLING lady susan climber

Blanche Marvin Critique

Disappointing reconstruction that would have been better left unspoken. Enclosed are other critics' reviews.

Time Out (***) Written by Alice Saville

Mike Bartlett's faux-Restoration comedy is good fun but a bit weak as satire. The plot is so (deliberately) nonsensical that it's almost not worth explaining it. But here goes: Phoebe Virtue (a delightfully mannered Cecilia Appiah) is, as her name suggests, a pure-hearted member of Gen Z who is concerned that her brother Jack (Matthew Broome) is acting the lad in London. So she goes there, disguised as a man, to spy on him. Meanwhile, Lady Climber (a brilliantly funny Rachael Stirling) is trying to launch a political career in a world where getting cancelled is the surest way to land a telly breakfast show. Their stories collide at the Netflix masked ball, where identities are muddled and queer confusion abounds. It's all a bit like a panto with more sex, more politics and no sweets chucked at the audience (tragically). Rachel O'Riordan's production gets some strong performances from the cast, but it never descends into the level of boisterous mayhem this kind of satire needs.

The Guardian (***) Written by Arifa Akbar

In Mike Bartlett's rambunctious, modern-day Restoration comedy, there are scripted instructions that "everything should be joyful and fun". Under the direction of Rachel O'Riordan, Scandaltown is a springtime pantomime of sorts, in which the classic features of 17th and 18th-century restoration dramas are re-spun with knowing humour, smut, silliness and arch references to the hypocrisies of the state, although the political satire in itself isn't sharp enough to sting. There is much delight in the spoofing of its genre: the typically revealing names, from Matt Eton (Richard Goulding), a repressed Etonian and Tory politician, to the conspicuously marginal character, Freddie Peripheral (Luke Hornsby). Rachael Stirling as Lady Susan Climber first appears on stage draped across a chaise longue in a fabulous basque and gold suit (Kinnetia Isidore's wardrobe is uniformly phenomenal along with Good Teeth's opulent set), her butler swiping her dating app for her. She is sparky in her central part, alongside a cast that is brilliant across the board.

Evening Standard (**) Written by Nick Curtis

Mike Bartlett's dramas vary wildly in style but also in quality: the elegant, deeply thoughtful works are balanced by sketchier ones. This contemporary Restoration comedy, starring Bartlett's sometime-muse Rachael Stirling as a modern social (media) climber, is one of the latter. It's laugh-out-loud funny at times but its discussions of freedom, liberty and responsibility – not to mention some last-minute gags about partygate – are schematic. It feels like Bartlett – whose blank verse drama *The 47th*, about a Trump run in 2024, opened at the Old Vic last week – wrote it to prove he could once again do something that no one else is doing. He plays with old and new concepts of virtue, pitting puritanically right-on youth against a selfish, hypocritical older guard. Young idealist Phoebe (Cecilia Appiah) travels to London to save her twin brother Jack (Matthew Broome) from the mire of sex,

drugs, and right-wing attitudes into which she fears he's sunk. The capital, just emerging from "a plague", is a hedonistic, cynical place, where gratuitous offensiveness is more likely to get you a TV deal than get you cancelled. Sound familiar? Alongside Stirling's controversialist Lady Climber there's Dennis Hedge, a working-class entrepreneur made good, caricatured Tory MP Matt Eton, and a smug TV exec, Rosalind Double-Budget ("DOO-blay BOO-zhay," she corrects), whose virginal son wants to be the new Ken Loach. The rest of the younger guard are represented by a PR consultant with an axe to grind, an anti-capitalist waitress and a gay flatmate whose name, Freddie Peripheral, sets up a long-running gag. Multiple cases of mistaken identity at a Netflix costume party lead various characters out of their sexual comfort zones – Matt Eton crosses the floor in more ways than one. As always with Bartlett, the writing itself is elegant: the mashup of Restoration cadences and modern argot is spot on. The thinking behind it is hazy, though. The idea that social justice is a religion for the young, and that the contract between the individual and society must be endlessly renegotiated, are half-heartedly discussed. The suggestion that new and old media distract us from what's really important isn't exactly new. The play paddles through the shallows of the culture wars while evading the treacherous depths. Rachel O'Riordan's production is deliberately mannered, dealing with archetypes rather than fully-fleshed characters in true Restoration style. Appiah has as much fun with Phoebe's preachy prattle as Stirling does with Lady Climber's vampy self-interest, but many of the performances are flat. Set designer team Good Teeth make use of backdrops and two-dimensional cloudscapes, while Kinnetia Isidore's costumes are garishly bizarre. Altogether the effect is showy but insubstantial. One comes away with the sense of having watched and enjoyed a diverting confection, a stylish exercise in pastiche with a gloss of contemporary debate, but ultimately superficial.

CURRENT

London Theatreviews

NATIONAL

****JACK ABSOLUTE FLIES AGAIN by RICHARD BEAN, OLIVER CHRIS based on RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN'S THE RIVALS director EMILY BURNS musical director CHRIS TRAVES décor/costume MARK THOMPSON lights TIM LUTKIN composer PAUL ENGLISHBY producer FRAN MILLER with JAMES CORRIGAN bob 'wingnut' acres, LAURIE DAVIDSON jack absolute, KERRY HOWARD lucy, JORDAN METCALFE roy faulkland, AKSHAY SHARAN bhaggi 'tony' khattri, TIM STEED brian Coventry, PETER FORBES anthony absolute, KELVIN FLETCHER dudley scunthorpe, etc.

Blanche Marvin Critique

A lively and enchanting production regarding aviation and the great sense of power when flying. Enclosed are other critics' reviews.

Guardian (***) Written by Arifa Akbar

Jack Absolute is the comically duplicitous, arch mischief-maker in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* which trades, typically, in love, farce, false identities and plenty of 18th-century social satire. Writers Richard Bean and Oliver Chris have taken Sheridan's comedy of manners as their inspiration and mashed it up with warm, nostalgic, Oh-So-British wartime humour. Directed by Emily Burns, the play takes place at Malaprop Mansions, temporarily housing a second world war RAF office, whose personnel include Jack (Laurie Davidson) and the woman of his dreams, Lydia Languish (Natalie Simpson), also a pilot. The silliness and humour sometimes sparks but Sheridan's razor sharp lines and social class critiques become mostly toothless in this transposition. The humour is, for the main, as over-familiar as the green pastures and rolling hills of the nicely compact set designed by Mark Thompson – we see the predictable punch-lines coming round the corner. Davidson's Jack is a generic, hapless hero, not disguising himself as the impoverished soldier Ensign Beverley, from Sheridan's original, but pretending to be the working-class northern mechanic Dudley Scunthorpe (whose real incarnation is played by Kelvin Fletcher) on whom Lydia has a desperate crush. Jack's father, Sir Anthony Absolute (Peter Forbes), in full military attire, seems to be channelling an upper-class version of Battery Sgt Major Williams from *It Ain't Half Hot Mum*. ("Be quiet, I'm shouting!") Criminally, Mrs Malaprop (Caroline Quentin) – a character so ingeniously conceived that her name entered the lexicon – speaks with too many malapropisms, which diminishes their comic effect. She has a cake "to salivate my birthday", mixes up clitoris with clematis, and it begins to sound increasingly strained. Others drop swear words, talk of erections and orgasms, and there are double meanings for "tits" and "trust engines" but the welter of double entendres sound twee and retro rather than risqué, rather like a Carry On, Sheridan. After the more successful *The Corn Is Green*, in the Lyttelton theatre, this is the second consecutive show at the National to glance nostalgically back at a bygone Britain and present a sentimentalised picture. For me, at almost three hours on its final preview night, this comedy felt forced, unoriginal and drawn out. It is a shame because the play is very good on showing the war effort to have included commonwealth veterans in the form of an Australian pilot (albeit one who speaks in Aussie-isms much of the time) and an Indian pilot ("everyone calls me Tony because they can't pronounce Bikram," he says, in one sharp line) as well as Lydia's position in the RAF. There is a great series of skits featuring meddling maid Lucy (Kerry Howard) and the love letters she connivingly mis-delivers; a wonderful scene featuring the second comedy couple, Roy (Jordan Metcalfe) and Julia (Helena Wilson), expressing the illogicality of jealousy; and a great dance scene between Jack and Lydia. If only this fizzing comedy was sustained throughout. The serious drama of war remains in the background except for a couple of moments, including a Battle of Britain enactment, but a late plot-turn into tragedy forces a lurching change of tone which does not feel earned, and has a jarring edge of emotional manipulation. Sheridan's play was originally halted in 1775 after some consternation over its bawdiness and its portrayal of the Irish character, Sir Lucius O'Trigger, who is absent in this production. There are accounts of apples being thrown by audiences (Sheridan swiftly redrafted the play to great acclaim). No one is in fear of being pelted by flying apples this time. Blandness is the problem here – it is too safe and familiar to carry Sheridan's potentially anarchic spirit of romp.

NATIONAL

***THE FATHER AND THE ASSASSIN by ANUPAMA CHANDRASEKHAR director INDHU RUBASINGHAM décor/costume RAJHA SHAKIRY lights OLIVER FENWICK composer SIDDHARTHA KHOSLA musical director DAVID SHRUBSOLE producer RACHEL QUINNEY with PAUL BAZELY mohandas gandhi, SHUBHAM SARAF nathuram godse, SAGAR ARYA vinayak savarkar, SID SAGAR narayan apte, RAVIN J GANATRA saradar vallabhai patel, MARC ELLIOT pandit jawaharlal nehru, IRVINE IQBAL mohammad ali jinnah, etc.

Blanche Marvin Critique

An exciting insight into the death of Gandhi. Enclosed are other critics' reviews.

The Guardian (**) Written by Claire Armitstead**

When it comes to taboo-busting, Anupama Chandrasekhar has form. She refashioned Ibsen's Ghosts into a reflection on the sexual violence in India. Now she finds a paradigm for Hindu nationalism in the man who in 1948 assassinated Gandhi. It's exhilarating to see such big, bold political history commanding the National Theatre's largest stage. Nathuram Godse was born in Maharashtra to parents so traumatised by the deaths of three baby sons that they raised him as a girl to propitiate the goddess who might otherwise take him too. This early emasculation, Chandrasekhar suggests, sent him on a quest for identity and purpose that led him first to Gandhi's unifying movement of peaceful resistance and then to the divisive politics of Vinayak Savarkar, who built the foundations of Hindu nationalism as a prisoner of the British raj. We meet Godse as a child who supports his family by channelling the goddess as a village fortune teller, while earning the respect of his peers with his prowess at spitting. On Rajha Shakiry's rotating stage, elegantly framed by the strings of a weaving loom, the children romp around in scenes that are interleaved with political debates between a darting-eyed Gandhi (Paul Bazely) and a sleek, grounded Nehru (Marc Elliott). A joke about "that phoney Attenborough film with Sir Ben Kingsley" points to the challenge of squaring up to such well-documented history, but Chandrasekhar does it her way, packing in so much background that at times it seems like an illustrated lecture on the commodities market: first indigo, then cotton and salt. By using a timeframe that darts around, and a focus that zooms in and out from village streets to thousands-strong historic marches, she keeps the drama ticking along. She is brilliantly served by director Indhu Rubasingham, with a staging that conjures multitudes from 19 actors while making clear that revolutionary politics are backroom affairs, conducted by players whose personal foibles will shape the course of history. While Gandhi capers around, almost childlike in his unworldliness, Sagar Arya's Savarkar is a chilling figure whose lofty contempt calls forth the latent paranoia in his followers. The insidious power of this tactic is demonstrated in close-up scenes at the tailor's shop where Godse works, turning the goofy young apprentice into an inquisitor, to the horror of his gentle, camp boss, as all the Muslim clients leave. The games of Godse and his childhood friend Vimala (Dinita Gohil) develop into a dialectic of political style and content: she is the open-hearted embodiment of Gandhian peaceful protest, he is a small man trying desperately to control the narrative and swat her out of his story. It needs a powerful actor to hold the centre as Godse, and in Shubham Saraf it gets one. He allows playfulness to billow through his body before resentment starts to corrupt it into a cock-strut of childish vindictiveness and finally into the farcical posturing of a desperado who knows he's been had, but can't work out by who, or what to do about it other than to pull the trigger. This isn't just a chapter in the sad history of the 20th century, but a story of division and whipped-up animosities that has its roots in colonialism and is repeating itself throughout the world today – not least in the UK's own grubby politics.

NATIONAL

****MIDDLE by DAVID ELDRIDGE director POLLY FINDLAY décor/costume FLY DAVIS lights RICK FISHER sound DONATO WHARTON producer VICKY HAWKINS with CLAIRE RUSHBROOK maggie, DANIEL RYAN gary

Blanche Marvin Critique

A moving and insightful exploration of marriage of the middle years. Eldridge has great sensitivity about close relationships and understands the ups and downs of a tremulous heart. Enclosed are other critics' reviews.

Guardian (*) Written by Arifa Akbar**

What's wrong?" says a husband to his wife when he finds her rustling up hot milk in the small hours of the morning. "I'm not sure I love you any more," she replies and her words leave the ground shaking beneath this couple's feet. It is an arresting opening to a marital reckoning which is a confrontation with midlife itself: its yearnings, disappointments and wrong turns unravelled in this capacious Essex kitchen-cum-living room, as Maggie (Claire Rushbrook) and Gary (Daniel Ryan) wrestle out their differences. The second in David Eldridge's trilogy exploring love and relationships, which began with Beginning, it similarly unfolds over an uninterrupted 100 minutes of conversation. But Maggie and Gary are not the couple of the first play. They are a decade older, on the brink of 50, with a young daughter and more than 12 years of married hinterland behind them. Directed by Polly Findlay (who also staged Beginning), Rushbrook and Ryan draw our sympathies both ways. We withhold final judgment on the rights and wrongs of their marriage largely due to their very human and likable performances, even if they do feel too much like a generic middle-aged couple, entangled in the web of a burdensome mortgage, the juggle of childcare, overwork, boredom, loneliness, peri-menopause and stale sex. Where Beginning captured the prospect of a shared future fizzing ahead, this play focuses on the backward glancing and inner audit of the middle years: is this what I wanted? Has marriage made me happy? If the first play was taut with expectation,

this one is saggy with familiarity and knowing, both in form and content. The same old gripes rise up between the pair repeatedly, giving the drama a circularity: his regret at not having more children, her resentment at his overindulgent fathering and having been left alone with the baby. There is a third party involved too – again a little predictably – which brings with it a chance to have a second go at life. Gentle comedy leavens out the resentments and brings some good lines. When she suggests they move into separate rooms, he quips: “I don’t think they have conscious uncoupling in Essex. Unconscious coupling, yes ...” But it takes away a certain edge and creates a foundational warmth between them so we do not fully buy into Maggie’s discontent. They seem like a sad, lost couple but without a deeply felt bitterness, cynicism or gut-wrenching anger. Then again, uncertainty is built into the plot line and this is perhaps a couple not yet past the point of no return. Eldridge is incredibly good at dramatising a culturally specific world – an Essex couple from working-class backgrounds and with upwardly mobile ambitions – that we do not often see in anything other than satirical or comic mode. The class tensions between them are expertly drawn out: how Maggie’s family looks at Gary’s and how that stains the couple’s view of each other to some degree. It feels like a true and tender representation of a marriage in its middle stages, a drama that is tepid at times, a little plodding and soft around the edges but forging on – much like middle age itself.

CURRENT

London Theatreviews

NATIONAL

***THE CORN IS GREEN by EMLYN WILLIAMS director DOMINIC COOKE décor/costume ULTZ lights CHARLES BALFOUR composer/musical director WILL STUART producer CHRISTINE GETTINS with GARETH DAVID-LLOYD emlyn williams, SAFFRON COOMBER bessie watty, IWAN DAVIES morgan evans, NICOLA WALKER miss moffat, etc.

Blanche Marvin Critique

This is usually a most moving plays which has always struck deeply into the heart so it is rather sad for me to express my disappointment in this production and in the portrait of the teacher who fed the flame of intellect into his young life. Enclosed are other critics’ reviews.

The Guardian (**) Written by Arifa Akbar**

It would be easy to write off this revival of Emlyn Williams’ semi-autobiographical drama as an example of post-lockdown “comfort theatre”. First performed in the West End in 1938, this tale of a talented Welsh miner’s son and his inspirational teacher is laced with sentimentality and tweeness. There is even a lilting choir of singing miners whose presence seems orchestrated to tug at our emotions. But if it is comfort viewing, it is undeniably artful, affecting and hugely entertaining. At its centre is the impoverished, illiterate Morgan Evans (Iwan Davies), whose teacher, Miss Moffat (Nicola Walker) gets him “over the wall” of his limited horizons and all the way to Oxford University. Evans is a Billy Elliot of the Valleys, of sorts, though the indomitable Miss Moffat gives him lessons in Greek and Latin instead of dance. Williams’ story may be sentimentalised but is worth remembering as a social history of the more unbendable days of British class privilege, and also of how generations of working-class school children broke through class barriers thanks to a grammar-school education. Dominic Cooke’s revival deploys a quirky theatrical device in which the playwright, Williams (Gareth David-Lloyd), is a character on stage who is constructing his story before the audience. This device cannot quite disguise the old-fashioned nature of the story or dampen its sentimentality, but it brings clever humour and is beguiling in its own right. The drama begins with an initially empty stage in a self-conscious game of make-believe, though Ultz’s set design gradually gathers its playfulness. There are Christopher Shutt’s crisp, hammy sound effects in lieu of props or set at the beginning – creaking for nonexistent doors that open as characters step on to the stage; the sound of a spoon in a china cup when a character drinks an invisible cup of tea. Actors never leave when they exit a scene but sit with their backs to the audience on the stage floor. Cooke’s direction is supremely well-paced and all of the performers have impeccable comic timing. Walker is delightful to watch, both in her angry exchanges with the supercilious Squire (Rufus Wright, excellently doltish), which bring sparky satire, and in her initially brusque attitude towards Davies’s sweet, laconic Evans. Miss Moffat is a bold, bossy, self-proclaimed spinster with oodles of no-nonsense charm. “I have never spoken to any man without wanting to box his ears,” she says. She’s a Henry Higgins figure, but develops darker shades. There is a zealous focus on the star student (she calls him “my little pit pony”) she is training for Oxford, but she sends the depressed young Bessie (Saffron Coomber, broodingly sublime) to a life of service, writing her off as “one of my failures” because she does not excel in lessons. Miss Moffat has developed a potential for tyranny by the time a drunk Evans confronts her about her autocratic, unfeeling style of pedagogy. It is a shame that the play does not develop this further, but quickly irons out the tension between them and returns to the clear, simple narrative that Evans wants to better himself. Their bust-up has shown otherwise, and he speaks poignantly of his desire not to be a bookish oddity in his muscular, working-class pit town, but to fit in. Our hearts do soar and melt, though, as the gifted Evans navigates his way towards a happy ending, and there are lovely, warm laughs along the way. This revival is a reminder that old stories, when they are good, stay that way, however riddled they are with nostalgia. April 7-June 11

CURRENT

London Theatreviews

NATIONAL

***SMALL ISLAND novel ANDREA LEVY adaptor HELENA EDMUNDSON director RUFUS NORRIS décor/costume KATRINA LINDSAY lights PAUL ANDERSON composer BENJAMIN KWASI BURRELL with LEONIE ELLIOT hortense, LEEMORE MARRET JR gilbert, MIRREN MACK queenie, MARTIN HUTSON bernard, etc.

Blanche Marvin Critique

One of the most moving and explanatory structures in theatre regarding the life of the people on this small island full of humour and love. It is a warming evening in the theatre. Enclosed are other critics' reviews.

The Guardian (****) Written by Arifa Akbar

There is arguably a calculated safety in staging a revival of this heart-wrenching Windrush generation story of war, love, migration and racial prejudice. Based on Andrea Levy's bestselling novel, which spawned a two-part TV series more than a decade ago, it was adapted by Helen Edmundson for a 2019 stage production and streamed by the National Theatre the following year. But it would be wholly churlish to sully this big, beautiful show with cynicism, given the wonders it accomplishes. Rufus Norris's immaculate direction, Jon Driscoll's astounding screen projections and Katrina Lindsay's breathtaking set are again central to its success, alongside a superb new cast. Lindsay's design is glorious in both grand spectacle and delightful detail. Gestural sets descend, ascend or are wheeled on – door frames, a sweet-shop counter, rows of chairs in a classroom. The show opens with a screen that becomes a bigger screen, and this Matryoshka-doll effect pronounces the self-conscious form of storytelling to come: several of the characters narrate the plot as it is being constructed on stage, sometimes with cheek and wit. The construction of the story works so fluidly with the assembly of the set that it is enthralling to behold. There are also vividly flashing interior monologues spoken front of stage, like a shared secret. The story follows a migrating Caribbean couple, Hortense (Leonie Elliott) and Gilbert (Leemore Marrett Jr), who arrive in the "mother country" full of hope, Gilbert having fought in the Royal Air Force, only to be met by hate and hostility. The other leading part is their white British landlady, Queenie (Mirren Mack), while the fourth protagonist of the book is her racist husband, Bernard (Martin Hutson), who is relegated to an ancillary role here. Levy's novel, written as parallel narratives, places Hortense and Gilbert at its heart. But Edmundson's adaptation sets Queenie at the centre. Hortense opens the production but her story is placed on pause for too long while Queenie takes centre stage, and when Hortense re-emerges we never feel quite as close to her again. Characters are more comic too, the story fuzzy-edged with sentimentality. But this does not take away from the grim scenes of racism that Gilbert in particular faces in postwar Britain. Edmundson's truncation of Bernard's backstory works well in highlighting the clearly displaced fear and illogicality around race hate. Every performance is vigorous, the three central characters wringing our hearts, though Marrett Jr's Gilbert shines brightest with indefatigable good nature underscored with simmering anger and fierce intelligence. If *Small Island* appears to have taken a place in the National Theatre's pantheon already, it is with good reason. And if it is part of a drive to put bums on seats, no matter: it is without doubt the highest calibre of guaranteed hit shows.

CURRENT

London Theatreviews sent Oct 5/2022

LYTTLETON @ NATIONAL

****BLUES FOR AN ALABAMA SKY by PEARL CLEAGE director LYNETTE LINTON décor/costume FRANKIE BRADSHAW lights OLIVER FENWICK composer BENJAMIN KWASI BURRELL with SAMIRA WILEY angel allen, GILES TERERA guy jacobs, OSY IKHILE Ieland cunningham, RONKE ADÉKOLUÈJO delia patterson, SULE RIMI sam thomas, list of extras

Blanche Marvin Review

Pearl Cleage's drama *Blues for an Alabama Sky* was originally written in 1995, telling the tale of New York City's black Americans in the 1930s, following a decade of artistic explosion, called the Harlem Renaissance, a recovery from the destructive Great Depression. For the first time horizons looked brighter in Harlem, where the artistic dreams were reawakened. The intimate story centers on two black couples living in the tenements as they struggled to raise their living position and financial status. The influence of Langston Hughes' poetry, which was the mainstream of Harlem artistry, are beautifully integrated into the dialogue, subtly following the historic movement of black women and their struggle for human rights in the USA. The play was also produced by the Atlantic Alliance theatre company in 1995 (an artistic off-Broadway company) and then revived in 2020 in an off-Broadway theatre on Theatre Row at 42nd Street. The Lyttleton, National Theatre offers the first British production of this play carrying the Black American history in 1930s New York exploring its hardships of survival which also explores a universal theme of making dreams come true. A portrait of this period is also relevant for UK black audiences.

'*Blues*' covers the intimate love stories, with unpredictable endings, of two couples living in a Harlem tenement. It follows the daily survival of Angel + Guy, plus Della + Sam. Angel is a showgirl who has cut her chances of success by brawling with her gangster boyfriend from the stage and is rescued by her gay friend Guy, a theatrical fashion designer. She ends up in a loving friendship living with Guy, whom she admires with his dreams of going to Paris as a special designer for the famous singer/dancer Josephine Baker. Angel thinks of herself "as a collared girl out of a job". Guy centres his current life as well as a potentially successful future on his sewing machine, making glamorous gowns for Angel to model on the streets of Harlem. But sadly interrupting this harmonious relationship, which destroys the dream of a united couple, is the arrival of Leland Cunningham, an ordinary salesman leading an ordinary life, a decent middle class man with a gun in his pocket. Dreams are not for him, but the power of the gun is the determining factor. He actually proposes marriage to Angel on his terms which she greedily accepts. The breakup between Guy and Angel eventually has sorrowful consequences when Angel aborts Leland's baby. It not only ends her relationship with Leland but with Guy, who provided her with a kind of stability. Angel's tragic journey is to remain in Harlem, using the beautiful Guy gowns for soliciting men. While Guy fulfills his dream of designing for Josephine Baker and buys his two tickets for Paris. Angel is left without any dreams, without Paris, and without Guy.

As for the couple next door, the god-loving Delia, whose dream is to bring birth control to a poverty-stricken neighborhood in the Great Depression, continues to work as a nurse. While Sam, a bachelor doctor with the kindest of soul, is worn out by having to deliver premature babies to weary women. Delia always had the door to her flat kept open until her first kiss with Sam, which recognised their love. Before completing their plan of marriage, Angel's need for an abortion intrudes upon their life and Sam is forced to perform it. When learning of Sam's part in the abortion, Leland dismisses Angel and shoots Sam. Sam's haunting death (one of the great images in the show), changes all their lives. It is left for Delia to escape her sorrow of Sam's death by going instead with Guy to Paris, leaving a bitter Angel to cope with a dreamless life.

The reflection of the entire USA environment of the 1930s is revealed in the hardships of Harlem. The booze, the gambling, the gangsters, were accompanied by the dreams of a new future. Guns and gin dominated the times. The ambitious dreams and its social realism are highlighted by the stories of these characters that we follow through the ambitious but loving Guy, the dependent Angel, the shy Delia, the determined Sam, and the rigid killer Leland

There was no need for the director, Lynette Linton, to have expanded this play into a "street scene environment", which intrudes upon the intimacy of the love stories. One can use the background of Harlem and its people on various levels, but not as a continual time changer. However, Linton captures the mood and spirit of the people and of the play itself with a sensitive touch. Her ability to direct not only actors but the poetry of the writing is a gift. Frankie Bradshaw's set and costumes accurately capture the colouring, the atmosphere, and period of the Harlem slums, revealing the cluttered life within the two flats, the stairway, and the street without any need of including a busy overcrowded neighborhood. Her Guy costumes, in particular, are a knockout. Loliver Fenwick's lighting and Benjamin Kwasi Burrel's music add so much dimension to the production. The sound system has improved and the miking of actors is less obvious. The performances of Samira Wiley (Angel), Giles Terera (Guy), Osy Ikhile (Leland) and Ronke Adekoluejo (Delia) are beautifully portrayed with special note to Giles Terera's Guy who required a special charisma which this actor exudes. This is another feather in the National's cap. No need for export. September 21 – November 5/2022

CURRENT

London Theatreviews sent May 13/2022

HAMPSTEAD

**THE BREACH by NAOMI WALLACE director SARAH FRANKCOM designer NAOMI DAWSON RICK FISHER sound TINGYING DONG with CHARLIE BEX Frayne '77, JASMINE BLACKBOROW jude '91, ALFIE JONES hoke '77, TOM LEWIS hoke '91, DOUGGIE MCMEEKIN frayne '91, STANLEY MORGAN acton '77, SHANNON TARBET jude '77

Blanche Marvin Review

Naomi Wallace is an American poetess who has written many plays. This play is the least effective of her various creations. Since she is essentially a poetess with little background in the structuring of plays, you are therefore captured by listening to her language but are dissatisfied by the essence of her storytelling ways. The play, though full of shocks is basically a story of a double rape as well as a suicide and at a workplace where the death leaves a father's limbs scattered across a construction site. The story has a specific point of view from the two siblings doing everything that they can to keep themselves going. The intent is to show the extreme feelings of love and sacrifice between a rough sister Jude and brother Acton, who is bullied in his later years to his death. The difficulty is having to follow the scenes alternating between the past and the present in the same Kentucky town. The siblings are close in protecting each other even as Acton forms a bond with two boys who keep him safe from the school bullies. The dangerous games the boys played in adolescence seemed to have had a familiarity with those in *Spring Awakening*. In the year of the 90s we discover how Jude was raped as part of a disgraceful pact by the boys, which foreshadows the score Jude counters against her assailants. Strong as the themes may be, Wallace doesn't know how to create in a dramatic format. As to the director Sarah Frankcom, in using a bare stage with indifferent lighting, makes it difficult to understand how and what the stillness is supposed to mean. She focuses mainly on the poetry. The first part of the piece feels oddly narrative with little movement to compensate in the second half. It does not help when the actors, in their confrontation scenes look into the distance or to the ground when speaking. If this is a play whose theme is about violation or consent, or sexual analysis, or violation without power, without economic factors, it is not projected with any depth, clarity or dramatic impact. Jude is supposed to be the injured innocent in addition to her heroic attempts at retribution for the rape. Her motivations are never explained with any clarity and her behaviour raises more questions than answers. Older Jude is mostly subdued or even at times blasé which negates any sympathy for her trauma or understanding of her current intentions. Her abusers (Doggie McMeekin and Tom Lewis), though in later years, explain their own victimisation, do not justify the rape. Their unpleasantness is not explored with any depth. Somehow or other none of the characters seem to be emotionally developed.

Wallace tries to capture many themes of deregulation, blue-collar exploitation and unsafe working places in the Regan era of the USA. Repetition is used as information, instead of insight into the killing of Jude and Acton's father from a fatal fall at work and their mother when being on strike, both, at the Hoke's Family Construction Firm. Instead it's used as a morbid game for the children and loses any purpose. Wallace's dialogue, uneasily spoken by the actors, is unnatural in its theatricality and contrivance. The story and its meaning may seem obvious on the surface but is confusing to follow, especially in and out of time. Sadly the poetess Naomi Wallace's name was the reason Hampstead Theatre did this play rather than for the play itself. No export for this USA play. May 6 -28/22

HAMPSTEAD

*THE SNAIL HOUSE writer/director RICHARD EYRE designer TIM HATLEY lighting HUGH VANSTONE sound JOHN LEONARD with VINCENT FRANKLIN neil, EVA POPE val, GRACE HOGG-ROBINSON sarah, PATRICK WALSH MCBRIDE hugo, AMANDA BRIGHT florence, MEGAN MCDONNELL wynona, RAPHEL FAMOTIBE habeeb

Blanche Marvin Review

The Snail House at Hampstead Theatre should have been called ...*The Turtle-Dove House?*.... A larger sarcastic symbol for carrying one's troubled home on one's back. Writer/director Richard Eyre uses the snail, who lives in its shell or home, as a symbol, which, according to a Nigerian saying declares, "it eventually reaches its home". That seems confusing to me. Unless in this case, the meaning of the snail is used to show how the father of this family finally faces the truth about his entourage, himself, and his home. Whatever the name may or might be, the symbol of the snail image, still needs the setting in the family's home and not in a huge school hall where the never-seen guests enter into another unseen room for the father's birthday while unimportant actors take up most of the time, in Act 1, to set the table for never-seen guests. A bit is also concentrated on the two adult children and their behaviour, in addition to the angry red herring the wife drops about her husband having had a fling with the caterer for the celebration of the father's birthday. Act 1 is all exposition and senseless staging because there wasn't much else unimportant actors, playing the catering assistants, could do but set the table. Other actors dropped hints of their identity or relationship to the father. We have to get to Act 2 to discover the full identity or purpose of the characters. There is little play structure where the characters build the plot through their intentions bit by bit. You do not set the focal point at the end of a play as a conclusion in the second act.

The use of the public hall is wrong as a location. The father, Neil, who carries his home and his career on his back is the centre core of the play and should therefore be placed in his home. He is a fifty-five year old paediatrician who as an expert witness found an innocent woman guilty of killing her child by excessive shaking. She then ended up in jail. This woman happens to now be the caterer for the celebrative dinner. Neil has a neurotic family of: nagging wife, an adult gay son with a professional political career seeking his dad's approval, and a hippy daughter, rebelling against a middle-class family, who's supposed to speak about her father at his celebration. Act 1 slightly sets up the main characters arriving for the celebration while the catering help of a young man and girl spend most of Act 1 setting the table and spiritedly horsing around. The main characters reveal a bit more in Act 2, but it is written as exposition. The only way to develop the plot of a play is to reveal in stages the pieces or clues via the characters which like a mystery leaves its solutions till the end. I may be bold, but I would like to rebuild the structure of *The Snail House* story-telling it the way I would have done when teaching at my playwriting course at the University of Illinois.

Set in the home of Neil, there is much tension over celebrating his birthday today by his wife, gay son, and rebellious daughter. Wife is a suspicious woman accusing her husband of having a fling with the caterer of his birthday party at the school's public hall. His gay son wants to speak about his father at the dinner but dad is uncomfortable about his gayness and chooses his rebellious daughter instead. Mum is worried over daughter wearing boots and denim jacket to the dinner, especially since she's speaking. She wants the daughter to come home to live. Daughter has deliberately moved away from home while joining all these political rallies which is shameful to Mum. Her son's gayness is a disappointment and her husband is a work-alcoholic who's sexually unfaithful. The son is the only loveable character with wit as he taunts his rebellious sister. The father dismisses his son while attempting to win over his daughter, barks at his wife's nagging, and scoffs at the idea of being unfaithful. Everyone in this messy household is preparing for the big event of the birthday dinner. In Act 2 the caterer comes to the house to collect her fee and monies for the banquet. Wife snubs her, son and daughter fight, caterer very tentative with father. She wants her money but the wife accuses her of adultery. Caterer denies any such possibility as does the husband but caterer turns on husband for an apology...to state he misjudged her and the evidence, which ruined her life, and to apologise for the pain he caused. The father in the end apologises, caterer gets her money, wife is stunned, daughter refuses to speak, son is shattered by the revelations, and father is till ready for his big day.....this is the turtle-dove household. I have tried to briefly outline the structure but that you can still follow the story-line and the weaving of plot through the characters.

I will not quote any of the other critics since the reactions were diplomatically critical. The feeling of saddened disappointment in the stature of Richard Eyre, the once artistic director of the National Theatre, the sensitive director whose reputation in staging has been so skillfully sustained, has suddenly been evoked. Hampstead Theatre has been reflecting brilliantly on their productions and staging, but sadly lacking in quality plays. Hopefully the next production will bear better fruit. No export. September 7 - October 15

HAMPSTEAD

***MARY by RONA MUNRO director ROXANA SILBERT décor ASHLEY MARTIN DAVIS lights MATT HASKINS music/sound NICK POWELL movement AYSE TASKHIRAN with DOUGLAS HENSHALL james, RONA MORRISON agnes, BRIAN VERNEL thompson, MEG WATSON mary/singer, SARAH WILLSON cellist, HAMPSTEAD THEATRE STAFF voices 1+1/2 hrs ...no interval

Blanche Marvin Review

"It's 1567. Meet James Melville, an intelligent, charismatic and skilled diplomat who is also one of the most loyal servants of Mary Stuart, the troubled Queen of Scots. It's a time of political turmoil and the shocking crimes he has witnessed have shaken him. Now he needs to decide who's guilty, who's innocent, and who is too dangerous to accuse. Change is coming, but at what price? Mary made some very poor decisions. He tried to warn her. He loved her yet, and that's a credit to him, he needed to think about what's best for Scotland..." a quote from the theatre as a description of the play.

Rooted in actual fact, Rona Munro's *James Plays* cycle is a major major work of great historical trilogies showing the demise of the Scottish monarchy. *Mary* is a fragment of the history as covered by the episodes that eventually led to her death. She as a Catholic Queen over a growing Protestant Scotland, was already facing a danger to be overcome. But Monroe is tracking the monarchs called James with her three imagined plays. *Mary* is an important part of the James sequence, though a lone section in this great creation. The story of *Mary Queen of Scots* is adjoined to the *James Plays* by revealing Mary through the eyes of three members of her court – diplomat James Melville, her loving sponsor since childhood; a Protestant fanatic called Agnes, who defies the Catholic Queen with her new Protestant religion; and an ambitious courtier/guard Thompson, who allies himself with the rebellious Scottish lords who plot the Queen's disappearance. There are two scenes of testimony – the first dominated by Melville and his support of Mary, the second showing the progressive change with Thompson being in charge – examining the crucial episodes of 1567 after Mary's husband Darnley is murdered by the Earl of Bothwell whom she marries or was she raped into marriage by him. At any rate, the results of their union were disastrous as it initiated rebellion, then abdication, and finally to Mary's death. She married Darnley for love but marriage to Brothwell was his grabbing of power. Did Brothwell rape Mary in order to marry a Queen? Munro's view is that Mary was raped and forced to go through with the marriage against her will. Was Mary already a pawn to be used on all sides? How innocent was Mary and how much was forced upon her by the power play of the political lords of the courts? Munro reveals just how vulnerable the women were, even those as powerful as Mary. Their sexual innocence could be easily judged and vilified. But what makes this play so potent and relevant is its focus on James, James Melville, a man of integrity who eventually is caught by the powers that be and so forced to join the condemnation of Mary whom he loved. Knowing that he could not win, he bowed down to evil, as he helplessly faced his alternative future. The strength of this story hits hard upon reflecting the circumstances of today and how good people can be manipulated to the other side. Sir James may have been under great pressure, his testimony of Mary's rape being questioned until it was demolished.... It was a great trauma that Mary's protector could be made a scapegoat. How frightening the theme of consent was in the past and now in the present.

Rona Munro has traced the history of Scotland, making the past come alive, projecting to the present with an enormous sensing of today's turmoil. She is continuing to trace the monarchs called James with three more plays. Her dual use of writing style is brilliantly displayed in the combination of past and present in addition to the storytelling and detailed information. She paints an odd portrait of Mary through the eyes of men, and not the traditional woman who followed her heart not her head in choosing the wrong man. Munro portrays a woman torn in a man's dangerous world of political and religious divides. Melville, as movingly played with tormented control by Douglas Hensall, reflects a buoyant man returning from his victory in Shetland to the saddened earl who abandons his Queen in her hour of need. Rona Morison, as Agnes, catches the fiery anger and brazened spirit with passion, even beyond the character's believability. Brian Vernel's Thompson credibly captures the shifting moods from a man afraid to fearsome. Roxana Silbert's direction is carefully and sensitively displayed as she captures the varied emotional levels of the characters in graduated climaxes. She has subtly pulled the pieces together of a difficult play in its way of storytelling. There's intrigue and some thrilling fiery moments despite the intermittent slow pace. Matt Haskins's lighting captures expressive interplays of shadow and light for suspense and Ashley Martin-Davis's set is as severe and sharp as the dialogue. The reaction of the critics has been varied which indicates how personal a reaction is to this piece. There really are no stars ***....and here is where I lose my objectivity...I was deeply moved by being reminded of the past, hoping our future will have a better chance. Export of the entire trilogy would be exciting.

October 21 – November 26/2022

CURRENT

London Theatreviews

HAMPSTEAD

**THE FEVER SYNDROME by ALEXIS ZEGERMAN director ROXANA SILBERT designer LIZZIE CLACHAN lights MATT HASKINS sound MAX PEPPENHEIM with NANCY ALLSOP lily cooper, LISA DILLON dot, JAKE FAIRBROTHER philip tennyson, ALEXANDRA GILBREATH megan myers, ROBERT LINDSAY professor richard myers, SAM MARKS anthony myers, BO PORAJ nate, CHARLOTTE POURETT WYTHE young dot, ALEX WALDMAN thomas myers

Blanche Marvin Review

An ailing wealthy patriarch and a fractious, dysfunctional family gathering in Manhattan to see who inherits. The family disputes memories and debate polarised opinions - including who will inherit Prof Myers' wealth and prestigious scientific institution. Responsible for thousands of births, he is suffering from Parkinson's Disease and facing his mortality. "He's become very abrasive with his condition and attitude towards people - that can be the effect when men lose their status and profession. He is going through this awful crisis and we see his past unravelling through the eyes of his daughter who haunts him as a young girl and makes him realise he wasn't actually a very good father. That makes the play incredibly moving." Myers' work on stem cell research has led to

accusations of creating designer babies and the withdrawal of funding. But his own daughter has a child with a rare genetic disorder which provokes extreme bouts of fever - The Fever Syndrome of the title - and asks him to help her have a child free of it.

The performances are sharp and assured, the problem is that Alexis Zagerman has set out to write not just a play, but a very important play about a scientific method, illness and the modern American family. Lots of ideas and dysfunctional personalities jostle for attention, but in the end, you find yourself paying more attention to Lizzie Clachan's immensely atmospheric multilevel set. It's particularly frustrating, because Lindsay's character, professor Richard Myers, a dyseptic IVF pioneer who has been struck down with Parkinson's, has the makings of a memorable

Whats On Stage (*) Written by Theo Zagerman**

Roxana Silbert's lucid production unfolds on Lizzie Clachan's multi-storey, compartmentalised set. The various rooms are arranged like a cutaway doll's house, enabling us to witness both intimate conversations alongside family gatherings in the open plan ground floor. Zagerman dives headfirst into some big themes – biggest of all the ethics of genetic modification. Robert Lindsay wrings every drop out of the Lear-esque Richard, a snarling, wounded big beast. Lisa Dillon is an exquisitely anguished Dot (whose younger self haunts her father throughout), while Waldmann and Marks show palpable fraternal chemistry as the twins. Poraj and Jake Fairbrother (who plays Thomas's boyfriend) make for sympathetic outsiders, and Gilbreath imbues Megan with flirtatious, skittish longing ("humans are not designed to sleep alone," she tells her son-in-law). Top marks too to Allsop for ensuring Lily's condition feels wholly authentic.

Guardian (*) Written by Arifa Akbar**

This drama declares its central theme in its striking design: a multilevel family home, cut open so we can observe what is said and done in every room as well as the front-of-stage dining table. The Myers are the well-to-do New York brood who collect around it to celebrate their father's lifetime award for services to science. Professor Richard Myers (Robert Lindsay) was an IVF pioneer but now has Parkinson's disease, and his job's central metaphor – of creating new life – plays out in his family's discussions around children, parents, legacies and inheritances. Siblings arrive, bicker, pick at old wounds, and occasionally bond. There is fine acting all round, not only from Lindsay as the "colossus" of a father now cared for by his third wife, Megan (Alexandra Gilbreath) but also his three children: the highly strung Dot (Lisa Dillon), the artist Thomas (Alex Waldmann) and his charismatic twin Anthony (Sam Marks). Their partners are added to the mix, as well as Dot's daughter, Lily (Nancy Allsop) who has the autoimmune syndrome of the play's title, which acts as kindling to the family conflagration. Except that fire does not come roaring to life, exactly. If Alexis Zagerman's play aspires to follow in the tradition of dysfunctional American family dramas, it lacks the fire of Sam Shepard's face-offs, the emotional depth of Tennessee Williams and the tragicomedy of Tracy Letts's August: Osage County, similarly set around an unhappy family reunion. Under the direction of Roxana Silbert, scenes take place in different parts of the house and this builds a certain intimacy and tension, although the dramatic effects of their humdrum conversations never quite live up to the promise that lies in Lizzie Clachan's dazzling design. There is testiness and shouting around the dining table but this is not savage or soul-baring enough to drive the stakes sufficiently high. If this is a consummately middle-class family, their fights are a little too bourgeois and the drama is simply not as febrile as it would like to be. The Myers, in fact, do not seem especially dysfunctional, the drama ultimately reinforcing the power of family love and warmth, even if it seeks to do the opposite. But it does have a soap opera quality which makes it easy to watch and some scenes come together with power: the moment Megan talks about her cracked hands, when she is really referring to an inner cracking up in her carer's role; also when Dot speaks of the constant anxiety, and cost, of having an ill child. Lindsay is the wobbling modern-day King Lear who apportions his kingdom – this New York brownstone and other financial assets – to his squabbling wife and children, and his part carries the wittiest lines as well as pathos. Even though the production feels too long, at well over two hours, with rambling dialogue, not enough action or big enough conflict, there is ambition in the writing that must be admired.

CURRENT

London Theatreviews

HAMPSTEAD

***THE FOREST by FLORIAN ZELLER translator CHRISTOPHER HAMPTON director JONATHAN KENT designer ANNA FLEISCHLE lights HUGH VANSTONE sound ISOBEL WALLER-BRIDGE with MILLIE BRADY the daughter, SILAS CARSON male friend, ANGEL COULBY the girlfriend, FINBAR LYNCH man in black, PAUL MCGANN man 2, GINA MCKEE the wife, SAKUNTALA RAMANEE female friend, TOBY STEPHENS man 1, EDDIE TOLL young man

Blanche Marvyn Review

The story is a moral one – of unfaithfulness and its consequences – presented in the mould of a crime thriller. It revolves around Pierre, a distinguished surgeon whose affair leaves him unbalanced, possibly murderous. He is a split self on stage, bifurcated through guilt and subterfuge, and his dominant half, Man 1, is superlatively performed by Toby Stephens, alongside Man 2 (Paul McGann). "Scenes play over and over again in my head," he says, and they do on stage, too, with small variations each time, so that no one truth can be pinned down. Stephens has a casual entitlement but also shades of Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov in his secret desire to be caught, to confess and be punished.

Translated by Zeller's long-term collaborator, Christopher Hampton, The Forest is masterfully executed and captivating to watch, but without the same emotional depth and power of The Father.

Guardian (*) Written by Arifa Akbar** Florian Zeller's brand of psychological theatre in which fractured inner states are expressed through form is undeniably slick. Like his Oscar-winning film, *The Father* (adapted from his play), this story of infidelity scrambles chronology and blends memory with fantasy to prove the slippery nature of reality. Part of its charm is in the unscrambling, though it remains a moot point whether style wins out over substance here. The story is a moral one – of unfaithfulness and its consequences – presented in the mould of a crime thriller. It revolves around Pierre, a distinguished surgeon whose affair leaves him unbalanced, possibly murderous. He is a split self on stage, bifurcated through guilt and subterfuge, and his dominant half, Man 1, is superlatively performed by Toby Stephens, alongside Man 2 (Paul McGann). "Scenes play over and over again in my head," he says, and they do on stage, too, with small variations each time, so that no one truth can be pinned down. Stephens has a casual entitlement but also shades of Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov in his secret desire to be caught, to confess and be punished. Translated by Zeller's long-term collaborator, Christopher Hampton, *The Forest* is masterfully executed and captivating to watch, but without the same emotional depth and power of *The Father*. A jigsaw with a piece missing, the story allows us to project our own meaning in its gaps, but even then it feels slightly flat at times, and too bound up in Zeller's signature style, which plays out like a similarly repeating game. It bears the intrigue of a thriller but resorts to clichés of the genre, too: the anonymous phone calls, the loose cannon of a lover, the quietly suspicious wife. Every woman on stage is not only betrayed but appears flat, particularly the lover (Angel Coulby), whose obsessive impulses veer into the "bunny boiler" stereotype. The wife (exquisitely played by Gina McKee) appears deliberately like a cipher, too. This may well be a reflection of the reduced way in which Man 1 sees them but they lack credibility as a result. Whatever its shortcomings, we cannot help but be seduced by this production. McKee sends shivers down the spine in the play's final moments, and the rest of the cast is universally strong, especially a surreal, whey-faced interrogator played with controlled menace by Finbar Lynch. Elegantly directed by Jonathan Kent, every element of the stagecraft shines and delights. A single, mono-note of dread in Isobel Waller-Bridge's sound design buzzes across the drama. Hugh Vanstone's lighting is striking, and Anna Fleischle's naturalistic set design is a good foil to the play's skewed reality. 21 Feb-12 Mar 2022

CURRENT

London Theatreviews

HAMPSTEAD Downstairs

*THE ART OF ILLUSION by ALEXIS MICHALIK translator WALEED AKHTAR director TOM JACKSON GRAVES décor SIMON KENNY lights MATT HASKINS sound YVONNE GILBERT illusion consultant BEN HART with RINA FATANIA catherine, MARTIN HYDER watchmaker, BETTRYS JONES april, NORAH LOPEZ HOLDEN georges, BRIAN MARTIN december, KWAKU MILLS jean

Blanche Marvin Critique

Let this illusion pass as an illusion. Enclosed are other critics' reviews.

Guardian (***) Written by Brian Logan

Alexis Michalik's time-hopping French hit about the history of stage magic is a diverting jeu d'esprit but there isn't much to see once you look past the misdirection. A matter of weeks after being delighted and confounded by Derren Brown, I'm very much here for a theatrical deep-dive into the history of illusion that takes in the "Mechanical Turk", the magic pioneer Jean-Eugène Robert-Houdin and the trailblazer in early cinema Georges Méliès. Alexis Michalik's time-hopping *The Art of Illusion* – a hit in France as *Le Cercle des Illusionnistes* – has now been translated for the UK stage by playwright Waleed Akhtar (*The P Word*). Its Frenchness feels intact, mind you: it's a jeu d'esprit that, like many a magic show, diverts from moment to moment but offers you very little to hang on to. We're lured into Tom Jackson Greaves's production by the mysterious Watchmaker (Martin Hyder), an immortal spirit of magic who pops up throughout the several story strands. He orchestrates the shifts between 1844, when Robert-Houdin (after whom Houdini named himself) buys himself a theatre; 1888, when the bootmaker's son Georges turns the same venue into a proto-cinema; and 1984, when romance blossoms between a thief and a woman whose bag he stole on the Paris Metro. It's a show that styles itself, like stage magicians tend to, as all-knowing and forever a step ahead of its audience. Unlike successful magicians, though, it's not slick or skilled enough to pull that off. The relationship with the audience, and the rough-theatre performance style, feels half-baked. The actual magic tricks (skills hastily acquired in the rehearsal room, we must assume) understandably lack panache. Increasingly, too, it begins to feel as if, behind the intricate construction and his relish for circularities and coincidences as his history of French illusion unfolds, Michalik's play doesn't add up to much. That said, I enjoyed getting better acquainted with these vignettes from entertainment history. And the cast do decent work with their fast-rotating roles, particularly Bettrys Jones as the more-than-she-seems victim of thievery, and Rina Fatania mining her various bit parts fruitfully for eccentric humour. *The Art of Illusion* is not without pleasures but it does lack the confidence and lightness of touch that might make Michalik's play fly. 26-28 January 2023

Evening Standard (***) Written by Nick Curtis

Something's got lost in translation here. A long-running hit in Paris, Alexis Michalik's 2014 play covers more than two centuries in 100 minutes, weaving a complex fabulation around the history of French pioneers of magic and cinema. But this English version is wilfully amateurish, full of oafish mugging, clumsy tricks and jokey British regional accents. Director Tom Jackson Greaves probably carries more blame than adapter Waleed Akhtar, whose play *The P Word* impressed at the Bush last year, though the dialogue here is far from sparkling. Whatever: this is the latest in a string of misfires from Hampstead, which recently lost its Arts Council grant. It's, sadly, also a poor

start to London theatre in 2023. Primarily, Michalik explores the history of Jean-Eugène Robert-Houdin, a watchmaker's son who became the father of modern conjuring in the 1840s, and Georges Méliès, the bootmaker's boy who took over Robert-Houdin's Parisian theatre and created the first sci-fi film, *Voyage to the Moon*, in 1902. But the narrative also stretches back to embrace 1700s automata like Vaucanson's Digesting Duck and the chess-playing Mechanical Turk, and forward into the 20th century. Here, a pregnant safe-designer called April and a vasectomised thief called December dig into the history of illusion and fall in love against the backdrop of the 1984 Euros football final. Their unlikely romance is explicitly designed to provide hey-presto surprises. Confused? You won't be, actually. The various storylines are clear and elegantly entwined and held together by an all-purpose master of ceremonies, ably played by Martin Hyder. I imagine they seem clever-dickish even in the ongoing Paris production, though. And here, you may get mightily bored as each fast cut between scenes introduces a new parade of gurning, flapping caricatures. Gender roles are allocated fluidly, to comic rather than political effect: the female characters all mince or harrumph while the creative males agonise and wave paintbrushes or card decks. It's not the actors' fault: they've been told to do it this way. The staging would be admirably simple if it weren't so coarse. Journeys are indicated by a clippy-cloppy toy coach or a vroom-vrooming car waggled in front of us. The year in which each scene takes place is painted on a prop or a costume. The tricks devised by 'illusion consultant' Ben Hart are basic and obvious. Michalik's point, that magic is the product of craftsmanship, hard work and endless disappointment as well as our collective need for wonder, gets lost. The undercurrent of chauvinistic pride in Gallic creativity probably goes over better in Paris, too. The frustrating thing is that there's fascinating stuff here, reality and myth: 20th-century escapologist Harry Houdini did indeed choose his name in tribute to Robert-Houdin, and stories of early automata and confected visual narratives illuminate contemporary concerns about artificial intelligence and fake news. But the smugness and the gendered, football-based in-jokes of Michalik's original have been exacerbated and the subtleties obscured in this misguided production. *Abacadabra?* *Abacadon't.*

CURRENT

London Theatreviews

ALMEIDA

***THE CHAIRS by EUGÈNE IONESCO translator/director OMAR ELERIAN designer CÉCILE TRÉMOLIÈRES, NAOMI KUYCK-COHEN lights JACKIE SHEMESH sound ELENA PEÑA, PETE MALKIN with KATHRYN HUNTER old woman, MARCELLO MAGNI old man, TOBY SEDGWICK speaker

Blanche Marvin Critique

Kathryn Hunter captures the quality and essence of this whole piece with her wonderful sense of humour but cannot compensate for the production that fails to complete the actual frame of the piece itself. Only because of Kathryn Hunter is this play worth the three stars it has been given. Marcello Magni was a strong partner in the way he handled the humour with delicacy and taste. Enclosed are other critics' reviews.

Guardian (**) Written by Arifa Akbar**

Kathryn Hunter and Marcello Magni are perfectly grotesque in this timely revival of Eugène Ionesco's absurdist classic. In Eugène Ionesco's 1952 tragic farce, a pair of ancient performers create entertainment out of the nothingness of their living room to fend off fear of the destroyed world outside. Director Omar Elerian's translation (with added meta elements) reaches for all its laughs and is woven into sparkling gold by husband-and-wife team Marcello Magni and Kathryn Hunter. She is a comic grotesque with the disconcerting movements of a ventriloquist's dummy, while he looks like a Marx brother. Despite their wizened appearance they are childlike, speaking in Edward Lear-esque nonsense verse and clasping hands for comfort in the pauses. The production builds deftly to the central premise of the play: they are throwing a party for nonexistent guests and seeking comfort in the unseen. The invisible guests' arrivals build to ominousness and laughter gives way to confusion, despair and suicide. The play was written in the aftermath of the second world war, and the couple's trauma and underlying desolation is only caught in snatches at first ("water water everywhere"), but Jackie Shemesh's warm lighting gradually turns harsh, and they appear whey-faced and ghostly as the script shows glimpses of the obliterated outside world ("London is now dead" and "the sky is red with blood"). Cécile Trémolières and Naomi Kuyck-Cohen's set is made up of lush layers of curtains to denote dramas within dramas, and Elena Peña and Pete Malkin's music is orchestral, spooky and cutely comic. 5 February-5 March

Evening Standard () Written by Nick Curtis**

Kathryn Hunter's performance is the main draw in this rare and laborious revival of Eugene Ionesco's absurdist 1952 play. You can't take your eyes off her as a clownish nonagenarian literally rearranging the furniture at the end of the world. Otherwise, this knowing, apocalyptic slapstick raises titters rather than belly laughs. Omar Elerian's meandering production feels like a curiosity for aficionados rather than a triumphant reboot of a classic. It's metatheatrical throughout. We first hear Hunter and her real-life husband Marcello Magni, playing actors playing characters called Old Woman and Old Man, arguing over the tannoy about whether to go on or not. "Too may words... it's a difficult play," he moans. A stage manager (Toby Sedgwick) shunts them in front of the audience and feeds them confusing props, cues and prompts that they make into an even bigger mess. Imagine *The Play That Goes Wrong* done by Samuel Beckett, and you're halfway there. The prattling couple are supposed to be on a flooded island, though the only clue is the occasional hoot of ships' horns and a gush of water the Old Man gets in the face when he opens an imaginary window. He's feeble and defeated, longing for his mother. She's supportive and loving, but mourning their estranged son. A stream of invisible guests arrives to hear a message to humanity the Old Man has honed over nine decades of honest mediocrity, and the couple struggle to find them

seats. You fleetingly glimpse something profound about loneliness and futility here, in a play written seven years after a World War. There's a very moving moment when Hunter and Magni, stranded in the middle of a revolving stage full of chairs, embrace tearfully. But the physical comedy largely feels forced, and Elerian's contemporary tinkering with the script – including a reworked ending – make the play harder, not easier, to engage with. It feels rotten to single out Hunter in what is essentially a family affair – she, Magni and Sedgwick started working together with the pioneering company Complicite nearly four decades ago. But she really is spellbinding as the girlish, coquettish Old Woman, nimbly doddering, as loose-limbed as a marionette. She makes the gibberish her character speaks sound truly amusing: and I won't forget her hilarious, simulated climax with a phantom lothario for a long time. By contrast Magni, an actor who specialises in anxious fluster, here seems to stumble and reach for words in a way that's not intentional. Sedgwick, mostly offstage, gets a downbeat, closing monologue ramming home that life, like theatre, is a pretence, while the set collapses around him. I approached this show with high hopes, based on the track record of the actors, Elerian's work on Arinze Kené's award-winning play *Misty*, and the memory of a triumphant revival of Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* at the Royal Court in 2007. The reason Hunter stands out in a largely disappointing evening, is that while everyone else draws attention to the arch, in-joke nature of the affair, she plays each moment with unalloyed conviction. Maybe the secret of absurdism is to play it straight

CURRENT

London Theatreviews

ALMEIDA

***PATRIOTS by PETER MORGAN director RUPERT GOOLD décor MIRIAM BUETHER costume DEBORAH ANDREWS, MIRIAM BUETHER lights JACK KNOWLES composer ADAM CORK with TOM HOLLANDER boris berezovsky, WILL KEEN vladimir putin, JAMAL WESTMAN alexander litvinenko, LUKE THALLON roman abramovich, YOLANDA KETTLE marina litvinenko, nina berezovsky, RONALD GUTTMAN professor perelman, SEAN KINGSLEY piotr, voloshin, etc.

Blanche Marvín Critique

This is a complicated rendition of political intrigue and exploration. The reaction is one of interest and confusion but directed with great skill. Enclosed are other critics' reviews.

Time Out (***) Written by Andrzej Lukowski

Peter Morgan's entertaining drama about Boris Berezovsky and Vladimir Putin falls short of its ambitions. This review is from the Almeida in June 2022. 'Patriots' transfers to the Noël Coward Theatre in May 2023. Tom Hollander, Will Keen and Luke Thallon stay with the cast. Peter Morgan's 'Patriots' feels both blessed and cursed by topicality. Clearly it would have been commissioned long before Russia's genocidal invasion of Ukraine. But here we are, some months into said invasion, and suddenly we have a play that tells the story of post-Soviet Russia via the rise and fall of the oligarchs – as represented by the rebellious Boris Berezovsky and compliant Roman Abramovich – while attempting to delve into the psychology of current global enemy number one Vladimir Putin. It's a huge subject to tackle, and for all its virtues, 'Patriots' doesn't entirely carry it off. Sporting an impressive bald wig, Tom Hollander plays Berezovsky, a gifted mathematician who might have remained in academia had the USSR not fallen and he not decided to step into the chaotic power vacuum. Hollander's Berezovsky is charming, mercurial and physically graceful. After acquiring control of Russia's state television station ORT, he basically becomes the most powerful man in the country, using his influence on President Yeltsin to act as the nation's power broker. Pragmatically, Russia is simply too antisemitic for him to be President himself. But what does that matter when he's the kingmaker? As it turns out, quite a lot: Will Keen's Putin is an awkward, essentially honest small-time politician who falls on hard times and turns to Berezovsky for help, having aided him in the past. Berezovsky blithely has him made Prime Minister, assuming he'll know his place. Putin does not know his place, and rapidly falls out with Berezovsky, whose explosive sense of self-regard leads to him fatally misjudging the situation by attempting to bring Putin to heel, by having his TV station castigate Putin for the Kursk submarine disaster. If I'm not mistaken, Morgan's basic thesis is that both Berezovsky and Putin were genuine patriots of sorts: Hollander's Berezovsky sincerely believes he had the rare intellectual gifts and vision required to steer the country from the Soviet dark age into a modern, global future; Keen's Putin wanted to cut down on corruption and make the oligarchs who'd carved up his lawless country follow the rules again. And both lose sight of their objectives: Berezovsky because of his overweening ego; Putin... well, because of his overweening ego, albeit very differently expressed, a stiff inability to forgive or forget any form of 'improper' behaviour, which for him starts with total respect for the President. It's an interesting, informative play, with three great performances in Hollander's brilliant, quicksilver Berezovsky, Keen's hypnotically plausible, hangdog Putin, and Luke Thallon's Abramovitch, essentially a nice enough guy who realises he needs the patronage of the others to succeed and sucks it up humbly, becoming stupendously rich in the process. 'Hamilton' star Jamael Westman also gives a solid secondary turn as an intense honourable Alexander Litvinenko. (There aren't many roles for women - though I suppose you could argue the same about Putin's Russia). However. With Russia currently waging a war of annihilation against a European country, Morgan's scholarly, sprawling thesis about the Russian '90s and '00s feels inadequate when it comes to talking about where we are now, despite coming tantalisingly close in historical terms. His Putin is fascinating, but it's clearly not the guy we're dealing with at the moment, and 'Patriots' even sometimes feels on the verge of trying to justify his behaviour. Moreover, despite our being endlessly informed that we – the Western audience – do not understand Russia, it felt to me – admittedly not 100% a Westerner – glaringly apparent throughout that we were watching a play written by an English playwright in which the characters had ultimately been imagined as different shades of English, from Putin's stuffy jobsworth to Berezovsky's mad scientist. For all Rupert Goold's typically zingy direction - there's Russian song, Russian booze, and even a Russia consultant, Yuri Goligorsky - it never particularly feels like a story about another country. I'm absolutely not saying English playwrights shouldn't be able to write about Russia. But I am saying that Lucy Prebble stupendous 2019 play 'A Very Expensive Poison' ultimately did it a lot better, capturing the swirling

psychosis and black farce of Litvinenko's assassination far better than Morgan's fastidious thesis. Ultimately Prebble's wild ride tragicomedy told us far more about where we are now than 'Patriots' does. It's a solid drama from Morgan, with a superior cast and an entertaining production. But the fact it threatens to say something devastatingly perceptive about the world in 2022 makes it all the more disappointing when it doesn't. 2 July-20 August

CURRENT

London Theatreviews

THE OLD VIC

**THE 47TH by MIKE BARTLETT director RUPERT GOOLD décor MIRIAM BUETHER costume EVIE GURNEY lights NEIL AUSTIN composer ADAM CORK with BERTIE CARVEL donald trump, LYDIA WILSON ivanka trump, FREDDIE MEREDITH eric trump, SIMON WILLIAMS joe biden, TAMARA TUNIE kamala harris, etc.

Blanche Marvin Critique

Inept understanding of the political situation as regarding Trump and the American government. The depth of the danger was never realised in this production but at least the danger was brought to life and the revelation of this horrendous man. Enclosed are other critics' reviews.

Guardian (***) Written by Arifa Akbar

Donald Trump's inner circle has, in Mike Bartlett's satire, turned into a Shakespearean court of a near future in which the former president is back in the game. The script, best in its granular moments of comedy, blends billionaire pomp with political chicanery, dynastic family drama and blank verse. Trump arrives on stage in a golf buggy, throwing out a prologue after which his children stride on looking like expensively dressed accountants with lacquered helmet hair. Bertie Carvel's Trump calls himself the devil and proceeds to have all the best lines. He also bears all the tics and inflections of the real Donald, encapsulating Trump's swaggering facility to amuse and to showboat, to coin an offensive catchphrase and use it to best effect. Tamara Tunie as Kamala Harris is just as magnetising in her performance, exuding strength and bounce but, like Carvel, steers away from a simple Dead Ringers-style impersonation. Like King Charles III, this play is partly spoken in iambic pentameter but despite the literary ingenuity in Bartlett's script, it falls oddly flat. There is intelligent direction from Rupert Goold and a handsome set by Miriam Buether, which captures a courtly majesty. But the drama looks and feels like a conceptual riff rather than truly Shakespearean in its effects. Carvel's Trump has shades of Richard III but is also a King Lear of the late capitalist age, not carving up his kingdom between his children but setting up a contest with only one winner of his inheritance – the free market at work even in the shadow of his death. At times it feels more like a sporting pastiche of Shakespeare's tragedies than a barbed satire on Trumpian politics. A comically sleepwalking Joe Biden (Simon Williams) is reminiscent of Lady Macbeth, Ivanka Trump (Lydia Wilson) fulminates with a generic brand of filial betrayal and ambition in her soliloquies and the blinding of a secondary character for spying is a nod to the Earl of Gloucester in King Lear. It is too literal in its central plotline too: set in 2024, Biden is on course for a second presidential run until Trump's comeback and an attempted military coup. The rebellion on stage looks like a flashback rather than a flashforward, taking on the iconography of the storming of the Capitol, right down to the infamous bull horned headdress, although the movements of the braying mob here are choreographed in rather laboured, slow-motion sequences. It is clear that this near future is a reenactment of the recent past with all the familiar accompanying narratives on the rise of American populism, from the arrogance of the liberal elite to the abandonment of the working people. There is even a subplot featuring siblings on either side of the political divide that plays out these arguments for good measure. In its ideas the play cannot plumb enough depths to bring up anything new – perhaps we are still too close to the Trumpian moment for any greater wisdom to be mined. In its drama it lacks atmosphere and jeopardy, its pace slow in the second half and its ending flat. There are some delightful lines in Bartlett's script nonetheless and it is in these moments that the play sparkles: an incarcerated Trump in an orange jumpsuit gives his jailtime a PR spin by claiming it will endow him with a "cool Mandela feel" in the eyes of the people. His slanging matches and put downs of Biden, who he calls an "elderly wizard". His eulogy of Machiavelli's The Prince although he admits he hasn't read it all because it was too long: "Someone summed it up, and it made sense." And the moment when Harris tells Trump that his legacy is a farce: "You will be mocked if ever you will be remembered," she says, and this play proves her point. March 29-May 28

CURRENT

London Theatreviews

WILTON'S MUSIC HALL

****THREE DECEMBERS by OPERA DELLA LUNA based on TERENCE McNALLY'S SOME CHRISTMAS LETTERS music JAKE HEGGIE libretto GENE SCHEER director JEFF CLARKE conductor TOBY PURSER décor ELROY ASHMORE lights MATTHEW CATER costumes GABRIELLA CSANYI-WILLS with LUCY SHAUFER madeline mitchell, LLIO EVANS bea, JEAN KRISTOF BOUTON Charlie

Blanche Marvin Critique

A very interesting rendition in terms of the relationship of three people. As always the singers are fine actors and the direction is beautifully handled. Enclosed are other critics' reviews.

The Stage (***) Written by Inge Kjemtrup

Choose your parents wisely, Bertrand Russell said, a shorthand way of saying that our parents have a lasting influence on our lives, for better or worse. In Jake Heggie's 2008 opera, Three Decembers, two adult children struggle to emerge from the shadow of their narcissistic mother. The Opera della Luna production (at Wilton's

Music Hall) of this 90-minute opera boasts a first-rate cast, although other aspects of the sung psychodrama are less satisfying. The libretto, by Gene Scheer, is based on *Some Christmas Letters*, a short play by Terrence McNally, who provided the libretto for Jake Heggie's hugely successful first opera, *Dead Man Walking* (2000). With three plum roles, one for a veteran singer and two for up-and-coming artists, *Three Decembers* has understandably received many performances since its debut in 2008 at Houston Grand Opera. The opera follows three characters – Broadway star Madeline 'Maddy' Mitchell (Lucy Schauer), her daughter Bea (Llio Evans) and her son Charlie (Jean-Kristof Bouton) – over three years: 1986, 1996, and 2006. In 1986, we meet Charlie, who is gay and living happily with his partner, Bert, in San Francisco. But the AIDS epidemic is about to disrupt their "newly-gained, hard fought for and deeply cherished world," as director Jeff Clarke describes the era in a heartfelt programme note. Charlie's sister Bea, who has her own personal problems, including a philandering husband, is sympathetic to her brother. Maddy, however, is indifferent or even intolerant, and to her son's fury, she can't even remember Bert's name in her annual Christmas letter. The siblings make common cause against their infuriating parent, and in an amusing scene, the two sing about their mother's love of shoe-shopping, a euphemism for going to therapy. Librettist Scheer's snapshot approach means a lot of contextual information has to be conveyed in the first scenes, which can be a bit forced. We gradually warm to the characters and the emotional pay-off comes in two scenes set in 1996: an anguished monologue by a bereaved Charlie (an especially fine moment from Bouton) and the revelation of a long-held secret from Maddy, a tour-de-force from Lucy Schauer. Llio Evans is also excellent as the outwardly perky yet inwardly miserable Bea. Heggie's music is tuneful and appealing, although the acoustics in Wilton's meant that the ensemble, nestled under a balcony one side of the stage, can cover the singer's words at times, which is problematic in an opera that relies heavily on dialogue. The Opera della Luna production is directed by Jeff Clarke on a very minimalist set (Elroy Ashmore). Costume designer Gabriella Csanyi Wills serves up a range of period-perfect apparel for the characters, reaching the apogee with a shimmering awards-ceremony dress worn by Maddy. 17 May-21 May

CURRENT

London Theatreviews

VARIOUS LONDON THEATRES

***LONDON INTERNATIONAL MIME FESTIVAL

Blanche Marvin Comment

This mime festival is one of the most important festivals covering a vast territory bringing recognition and life to many different artists that would be left unseen and unspoken. Whatever praise one can give to the festival one should give in multiple appreciation. Thank you Mime Festival for all the productions that you have brought to life.

Information:

After last year's temporary move online, LIMF returns large and live. Our 14 productions include no fewer than 7 LIMF cocommissions and puts British work centre-stage. Sean Gandini's contemporary juggling stars open the season with a dazzling new show inspired by Merce Cunningham moves, whilst Barely Methodical Troupe reprises its thrilling *Kin*, one of several exceptional works by some of this country's most exciting young circus-theatre artists. Other UK highlights include premieres by *Opposable Thumb*, *Theatre Re*, *The PappyShow*, *Thick & Tight* and a restaging of *Vanishing Point's* international hit, *Interiors*. From France there are spellbinding productions from LIMF favourites, *Stereoptik* and Aurélien Bory's *Compagnie 111*. This year's five, exclusive, festival-commissioned short films, screening online, are all by international artists, plus we have a special movie collaboration with the Barbican featuring Belgium-based physical comedy masters, Abel & Gordon. Postshow discussions with creators and performers and expertly led workshops complete the programme.

CURRENT

London Theatreviews

RSC

**RICHARD III by WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE director GREGORY DORAN designer STEPHEN BRIMSON LEWIS lights MATT DAW composer PAUL ENGLISHBY sound CLAIRE WINDSOR music director BRUCE O'NEIL producer BEN TYREMAN with ARTHUR HUGHES richard iii, MINNIE GALE queen margaret, ROSIE SHEEHY lady anne, BEN HALL duke of clarence, OSCAR BATTERHAM lord rivers, CLAIRE BENEDICT duchess of york, ASHLEY D GAYLE king edward iv, KIRSTY BUSHHELL queen elizabeth, WILL EDGERTON grey, MICAH BALFOUR lord hastings, etc.

Blanche Marvin Critique

Little need to be analysed as far as Richard III is concerned. Here is a production that crippled what has been a major work throughout the years. The great publicity was that the actor playing Richard III had a reduced arm which made him a cripple to suit the part but that is never enough to make a production of quality. Enclosed are other critics' reviews.

Guardian (***) Written by Arifa Akbar

Arthur Hughes is the scheming sociopath in a production of magisterial stagecraft that builds to a powerful climax. Arthur Hughes is the first disabled actor to play Shakespeare's supervillain for the RSC. While the text ties the "rudely stamp'd" character's evil nature to his "deformity", Gregory Doran's production goes some way to correcting that false equivalence. This Richard is an ambitious amoralist, not exaggeratedly hunched and limping

in the Laurence Olivier mould. As the rapacious Duke of Gloucester, Hughes is a handsome, swaggering sociopath aware of his effect on the trembling Lady Anne (Rosie Sheehy, excellent) whom he woos by the grave of Henry VI, her father-in-law whom he killed along with her husband. He is aware, too, of how he bewitches his posse on his machiavellian rise to power. Hughes's Richard is every bit the schemer, dead-eyed and unmoved by the body count he leaves on the way to the throne, but he also has a smarmy mischief about him, delivering news of another dispatched victim in a breezy tone of voice and eking comic asides out of his character's darkness. It gives a strange note to his villainy. He does not always seem vicious enough, even when he is giving orders to kill former allies. There is comedy further afield. The two murderers (Conor Glean and Joeravar Sangha) contracted to kill the Duke of Clarence (Ben Hall) resemble a double act, and it brings entertainment but mitigates the play's sense of terror. Episodes of brilliance eventually arrive: when Richard reveals his anger beneath the dissembling and Hughes's eyes flash dangerously; when the eerie figure of Queen Margaret (Minnie Gale) screechingly delivers her curse (with her wine-red dress and weeping white-blond hair, she looks like a Shakespearean Sadako); and when the anxious Queen Elizabeth (Kirsty Bushell) is turned away from the tower where her sons will be smothered to death. There are also compelling performances from Claire Benedict as Richard's mother and Micah Balfour as Lord Hastings, especially when he is betrayed and sent to the block.

This production shines in its aesthetics and stagecraft, which has a magisterial splendour. The stage has dark red walls, suggesting both umbilical and murderous blood. Stephen Brimson Lewis's set shimmers with striking colours, with a single column at the back on which coloured light is projected. Matt Daw's lighting is sensational, with a scintillating play of shadow and silhouette, and so is the celestial sound of a boy treble, Oliver Cooper, who stands at a balcony singing angelically while Richard's devilry takes place. It is a shame the visceral power of the play comes so late but these climactic moments bring the full force of the drama's eeriness and emanate Richard's fear and desperation. June 23-October 8

Whats On Stage (**) Written by Michael Davies**

An unlikely, morally bankrupt schemer, bereft of empathy and surrounded by sycophantic hypocrites, climbs to the top of the political greasy pole, only to find himself fatally exposed by his own narcissism and ineptitude. It's easy to see why Shakespeare is timeless. This RSC production marks the penultimate play in the company's ten-year journey to stage all of the First Folio ahead of the quatercentenary of its publication next year. Only All's Well That Ends Well remains, to be produced later in the summer. Outgoing artistic director Gregory Doran helms this clamorous offering, which completes a trilogy that was begun with two Henry VI plays, retitled Rebellion and Wars of the Roses. Like those productions, there is plenty to enjoy in this straightforward, uncomplicated retelling of Shakespeare's twisted history. Much has been made of the casting of Arthur Hughes in the title role, the first disabled actor in the RSC's history to tackle what is perhaps the greatest disabled character ever written. In the end, his physicality becomes almost irrelevant to his performance, which delivers on his promise from the Henrys to present a Richard whose paranoia consumes and overwhelms his ambition. At times the tone, like that of the production itself, veers towards overly frenetic and intense, but ultimately it all stays the right side of irritating – although the 110-minute first half could certainly stand a little trimming. But there are some genuinely theatrical moments, including a beautifully created Battle of Bosworth in which the ghosts of Richard's victims are transformed into a majestic steed, the loss of which prompts his most famous line. Designer Stephen Brimson Lewis and composer Paul Englishby add much to the dramatic success. The space is almost entirely empty except for a huge cenotaph upstage centre, and Matt Daw's lighting generates much of the atmosphere. Lewis's costumes are essentially traditional, in keeping with the aesthetic, and it looks magnificent. From the ghosts' eerie incarnation to the extraordinary grey locks of Minnie Gale's extraordinary, vengeful Queen Margaret, every detail is carefully placed. There are performances to match, too, with Jamie Wilkes's Cummings – sorry, Buckingham – chief among the devious dukes manoeuvring for position around the branches of the Houses of York and Lancaster. Ben Hall, Simon Coates and Micah Balfour all make for strong courtiers, while it can surely only be a coincidence that Nicholas Armfield's Earl of Richmond, opposing Richard on the battlefield, bears a passing resemblance and manner to Keir Starmer. In a play in which so much metaphorical violence is done to the female characters, it's a testament to the storytelling that the four wronged queens provide the emotional core of the production. As well as the aforementioned Gale, Claire Benedict imbues Richard's mother with a steely horror at her creation, while Rosie Sheehy's Lady Anne offers some rationale behind the character's bizarre decisions. Kirsty Bushell, meanwhile, combines genuine pathos with righteous fury as the mother of the murdered princes in the tower. Individually they are powerful; together they're invincible.

CURRENT

London Theatreviews

GLOBE

***KING LEAR by WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE director HELENA KAUT-HOWSON assistant director NAEEM HAYAT composer CLAIRE VAN KAMPEN designer PAWEL DOBRZYCKI costume HATTIE BARSBY with KATHRYN HUNTER king lear, MICHELLE TERRY cordelia/lear's fool, MARIANNE OLDHAM regan, ANN OGBOMO goneril/curan, KWAKU MILLS edgar, RYAN DONALDSON edmund, MARK JAX cornwall, DIEGO MATAMOROS gloucester, etc.

Blanche Marvin Critique

I would leave any comment on this and allow the reviews of the others to give the impact of the production. Enclosed are other critics' reviews.

Guardian (**) Written by Mark Lawson**

If the current state of Britain were to reflect a Shakespeare play, many might hope for Richard II: weak and despised leader brutally deposed. But with Boris Johnson resisting that plot, it is King Lear – a nation disintegrating amid a sense of everything ending – that feels most apt. Started by Helena Kaut-Howson but realised by the cast as the director recovers from injury, the new Globe production stresses these topicalities. Costumes are modern and performers verbally underline the repeated negativities – “nothing”, “worst”, “madness” – that echo harshly across the text. Kathryn Hunter reprises a title role she first played for Kaut-Howson in 1997. Though it is now common for women to play male classical parts – and “authentic” casting for Lear would require an octogenarian who had lost his mind and children – such productions often feminise the characters (Prospera, Malvolia), or provide explanatory context: performance in a women’s prison, say, or in Glenda Jackson’s 2016 Old Vic Lear, cross-gendering as a rehearsal room exercise. Hunter’s first Lear used the framing of a performance by care home residents, but this time she trusts to her extraordinary transformative powers to play it as written. She is explicitly an elderly king, channelling the higher voice and epicene appearance that falling hormones can cause in male old age. Long white wispy hair atop Hunter’s slight frame gives the paradoxical appearance of a geriatric child, although with enough menace in the voice (every syllable crisply hit) to have cowed the court until now. The extreme yoga agility that is a signature of many Hunter performances – including some steeping gymnastics in the recent Almeida revival of Ionesco’s The Chairs – is deliberately suppressed here to convincingly suggest frailty. Globe artistic director Michelle Terry is both Cordelia and Fool, casting made possible by their sharing no scenes and made plausible by Lear’s reference to that daughter as “my poor fool”. As the court clown, with Pierrot white face and long coat and scarf suggesting an audition for Doctor Who, Terry becomes one of the few actors in this role to win big laughs from the riddles and doggerel. Kwaku Mills compellingly gives Edgar a Hamlet-like arc from weakness to resolve. Lear is a wintry tale and a premiere on the sunniest day of the year made some early scenes feel, in every sense, too light. But the mood darkened with the sky above our disunited kingdom and the final Lear-Cordelia scene was almost unbearably affecting. Hunter takes her place, with Derek Jacobi, Ian McKellen, Paul Scofield (on film), and Glenda Jackson among the Lears seared in my mind. June 10 – July 24

CURRENT

London Theatreviews

SOUTHWARK PLAYHOUSE

***ANYONE CAN WHISTLE book ARTHUR LAURENTS music/lyrics STEPHEN SONDHEIM orchestration CHARLIE INGLES director GEORGIE RANKCOM musical director NATALIE POUND choreographer LISA STEVENS décor/costume CORY SHIPP sound JUSTIN TEASDALE lights ALEX MUSGRAVE production manager ADAM SMITH with KATHRYN AKIN mature woman, NATHAN TAYLOR bealiff, ALEX YOUNG lead, with ensemble JORDAN BROATCH, SAMUEL CLIFFORD, SHANE CONVERY, TEDDY HINDE, HANA ICHIJO, DANNY LANE fat adviser serious, MARISHA MORGAN, CHRYSTINE SYMONE, RENAN TEODORO fat adviser comic, JENSEN TUDTUD

Blanche Marvin Critique

A joyous production fulfilling all the humour this particular piece can bear. Enclosed are other critics' reviews.

Guardian (**) Written by Mark Lawson**

Some Stephen Sondheim flops – Assassins, Merrily We Roll Along – received such admiration on revival that they became core repertory. However, London’s first Sondheim musical since the composer’s death in November is a show that not only got away but stayed there: Anyone Can Whistle, pulled after nine Broadway performances in 1964, remains an elusive curiosity. A measure of the mess it became is that the best song, There Won’t Be Trumpets, imagining how a Messiah may arrive, was cut in New York to save time, but, after becoming a cabaret standard, restored to the score. Sondheim’s second professional musical as both composer and lyricist (after A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum) and his first not based on an existing literary text, Anyone Can Whistle is an absurdist political satire set in dramatist Arthur Laurents’ imaginary town bankrupted by corrupt Mayor Cora, whose gormless entourage conjure a fake miracle of water pouring from a rock. The fillip from pilgrims brings visitors including shrink Dr Hapgood (later referenced as a Stoppard title character), and Fay, a nurse who may have come from Lourdes to assess a rival shrine. The plot is absurd both as a theatrical genre and pejoratively, although with some serious intent: there are four references to Ibsen plays and, in reflections on the risk of putting faith in leaders, glimpses of the recent JFK assassination and the demagogic presidential run of Republican senator Barry Goldwater in the premiere year. The songs are most interesting for tryouts of rhyming and rhythm that Sondheim will later perfect.

Simple, a 13-minute sequence of song, dialogue and action featuring a dozen performers, anticipates mature bravura montages in Pacific Overtures and Sunday in the Park With George. Somehow accomplishing Simple and other busy songs on a thin strip of stage, Georgie Rankcom’s production brilliantly gives the show new contexts. Psychedelic costumes (Cory Shipp) suggest how it anticipated (if satirically) “hippy” musicals of the next decade such as Godspell, Jesus Christ Superstar and Pippin. And, most transformationally, a local “lunatic asylum” (in the vernacular of then) becomes, through a young cast, four of whom identify in the programme as non-binary, explicitly a place where society confines those who won’t conform. Jordan Broatch, in their professional debut, is a blazingly engaging Hapgood, and Chrystine Symone gives soaring performances of the title number and Trumpets, making us glad Sondheim saw sense over that song’s excision, while Alex Young’s Mayor, adept at physical and vocal comedy, nails truths about political liars. April 1-May 7

non-subSIDISED

CURRENT

London Theatreviews sent Mar 24/2022

BRIDGE

****STRAIGHT LINE CRAZY** by DAVID HARE composer GEORGE FENTON director NICHOLAS HYTNER décor BOB CROWLEY lights JESSICA HUNG HAN YUN costumes COSPROP with RALPH FIENNES robert moses, DANNY WEBB governor al smith, HELEN SCHLESINGER jane jacobs, GUY PAUL henry vanderbilt, DAVID BROMLEY stamford fergus, ALANA MARIA shirley hayes, AL COPPOLA sandy mcquade, IAN KIRKBY lewis mason

Blanche Marvin Review

The Bridge theatre with its adaptable open stage offers this realistic play, set in the offices of Robert Moses, who was the most powerful man in New York in creating parks, bridges and expressways, but who overlooked the local protesters who defied his concepts of citified living. He broke up the housing of the poor people in order to make highways or beautiful gardens, but which left them homeless. The play, written by David Hare, may be an important political comment but it never touches an English audience's sense of concern over the past history of New York City. Strange that it was chosen, even if it's a play by David Hare. It is as well directed as possible by Nicholas Hytner, who manages to keep a flowing energy despite the lack of interest or substance. The vast company of actors including Julie Atherton, Holly Atkins, Wendy Mae Brown, Pip Carter, Samuel Creasy, Ella Decres, Ayesha Dharker, Heather Forster, Naomi Frederick, Richard James-Neale, John Light, Dearbhla Dacres, Ayesha Darker, Heather Forster, Naomi Frederick, John Light, Tomi Ogbaro, Sid Sagar, Nick Sampson and Sky Young, is efficient if overcast. Ralph Fiennes as the star playing Robert Moses does the best that he can to portray a boring man, but not even his magic, can light any energy into a dying ember. The sound system at the Bridge along with the miked actors was at times disturbing but on the whole, the attempts made to enable the clarity of Hare's dialogue did succeed. This sincere effort on a controversial subject is sadly not theatrically exciting despite the professionalism of the whole production, the adept direction of Nicholas Hytner, and a great star like Ralph Fiennes. No export. March 14 – June 18, 2022

CURRENT

London Theatreviews sent July 27/2022

BRIDGE

*****THE SOUTHBURY CHILD** by STEPHEN BERESFORD director NICHOLAS HYTNER producer BRIDGE THEATRE & CHICHESTER FESTIVAL costume YVONNE MILNES décor MARK THOMPSON sound GEORGE DENNIS lights MAX NARULA with ALEX JENNINGS david highland, RACHAEL OFORI naomi highland, JO HERBERT susannah highland, PHOEBE NICHOLLS mary highland, HERMIONE GULLIFORD janet oram, JOSH FINAN lee southbury, SARAH TWOMEY tina southbury, JACK GREENLEES craig collier, HOLLY ATKINS joy sampson

Blanche Marvin Review

The open stage of the Bridge theatre is adjustable in size and shape to every production and attempts having a flexible sound system as an accompaniment. The back end of the living quarters of the vicarage is our realistic setting with a view of the exterior grounds seen through the windows. It is well imagined with acoustics aimed at best volume. The vicar's home is in a remote coastal parish, where he is frequently and cynically drunk with great determination in his isolation. He is severely stern with a bereaved parishioner and gradually distances himself from the town folk and personal relationships. His own family, regarding his marriage and children, is beginning to fracture. The vicar, David Highland, is now in a dangerous position where he not only must face a fractured family but also a future that could end his position in the town as well as eliminate his every belief. Despite all this destruction, a black comedy flows beneath the surface as it digests and analyses the core of family life, the divisive factors threatening a divisive community and its rituals. Nicholas Hytner, as always, directs with sharp clarity, cleanly stressing the storyline that leads to the climax. He is so versatile in staging the various differences of acting areas and styles of storytelling that he manages to convey the mood of this seriously dark comedy and its threatening overtones. His great strength with actors is a guarantee of sterling performances which is achieved from every actor in the company. Alex Jennings as the vicar runs the gambit of emotional turmoil and humour but always with sincere truth. Mark Thompson's set, Max Narula's lightning, and George Dennis' sound establish the scenes with such accuracy that it immediately places the locations of this remote coastal village. Alex Jennings as David gives his usual proficient performance and captures the essence of the character and his range of emotions with sincere truth. Phoebe Nicholls as his long suffering wife Mary paints a sympathetic portrait, Rachael Ofori and Jo Herbert as David's daughters characterise with earnestness the anxiety and frustration of his daughters. Josh Finan as Lee Southbury offers deep concern and credibility in a very stirring performance. All the remaining actors perform with the same truthfulness. This co-production was first produced at Chichester and then transferred to the Bridge. Export is questionable. July 1- August 27, 2022

CURRENT

London Theatreviews sent Sep 29/2022

BRIDGE

*****JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN** by HENRIK IBSEN adapter LUCINDA COXON translator CHARLOTTE BARSLUND director NICHOLAS HYTNER décor ANNA FLEISCHE costumes LIAM BUNSTER lights JAMES FARNCOMBE sound GARETH FRY with SIMON RUSSELL BEALE john gabriel borkman, SEBASTIAN DE SOUZA erhart borkman, CLARE

HIGGINS gunhild borkman, DAISY OU frida foldal, MICHAEL SIMKINS wilhelm foldal, ONY UHIARA fanny wilton, LIA WILLIAMS ella rentheim

Blanche Marvin Review

The Bridge Theatre is a fairly new theatre seating almost 1500 and based on the premise of being repertory-sized, overlooking the beautiful Embankment near Tower Bridge. The outdoor environment is a delight in the summer and rather inspiring with the Tower Bridge as an overpowering background to the theatre, surrounded by the chic restaurants, the beauty of the Thames, and all the towering buildings of the Embankment. Nicholas Hytner, former artistic director of the National Theatre, along with Nick Starr built this new theatre directly after their departure from the National and have tried to continue the programming that they initiated at the National which, of course, has three theatres, the open stage Olivier (the massive size of the Bridge), the proscenium middle sized Lyttleton, and the studio size for new works at the Dorfman. Though the Bridge does not have three theatres, they have tried to do plays of all sizes in that one space. *John Gabriel Borkman* could have been a classic well suited for the Lyttleton, but here at The Bridge, the open stage has a projected thrust so that it has more intimacy and is closer to the audience. Ibsen has been adapted by Lucinda Coxon from a translation by Charlotte Barslund. Though not updated it has been abbreviated into one act, with no interval, eliminating a good part of the motivation for Gunhild Borkman's transition and John Gabriel Borkman's inner search in the second act. The concept of condensing Ibsen and keeping to a mood piece is brilliantly handled by Nicholas Hytner, but even he cannot compensate for the loss of Act II. The play opens on a modest room of the Borkman family house setting the atmosphere immediately while above this room is Gabriel's desolate bedroom isolated from the rest of the house with the added level where a piano is placed with the music of Franz Liszt as arranged by Camille Saint-Saens and brilliantly played by Daisy Ou.

The action is confined to a single night set 8 years after Borkman's (Simon Russell Beale) release from his 5-year jail sentence for embezzlement. He has marooned himself in his bedroom from his estranged wife (Clare Higgins) who lives on the floor below, still infuriated over his squandering all of her money. He dreams of returning to his old-power, rebuilding the family name and the money through their son Erhart (Sebastian De Souza) whom Gunhild calls her avenging angel. Her sister Ella (Lia Williams) was John Gabriel's first love before Gunhild. Ella not only loved and mothered Erhart during his parents' disgrace, but also was the only one who remained financially secure and literally supported the family in their current house. Erhart is a student who has negated his father's dreams and decided to leave them all with his older-aged lover Fanny Wilton (Ony Uhiara). What happens to the three-membered family is the central force of the story. Gunhild finally brings John Gabriel to a hotel in the mountains (5 minute scene supplanting Act II) where they search for some further symbolic conquest, but where instead John Gabriel dies and Ella is once again left to rescue her sister Gunhild. Is the point of the play that John Gabriel Borkman may have deserted his love for Ella because it was a distraction and that his career and money were more important? Or is it that love has greater power as Ella commands than the destructiveness of selfishness, greed, and one-up-man-ship? In cutting down this play, the transitions become a choppy road of symbolic abstractions as well as realism to follow. When you cut from the desolation of living in a house to the actual mountain where John Gabriel dies, there is a big jump in not being able to see the motivation in leaving their house to encountering the dangers of nature in the mountains. The play's combination of reality and abstraction is difficult enough to follow emotionally. Running the gamut of monetary shame to the search for one's soul is a leap in the air not easily achieved and one cannot then interrelate all the pieces of this mixture of mood and motivation. The production is top drawer but the play as adapted by Lucinda Coxon has been misunderstood. Anna Fleische's decor Liam Bunster's costumes James Farncombe lights Gareth Fry's sound are full of mood and spark with the enlightening of storytelling. Simon Russell Beale as John Gabriel Borkman is as always a naturalistic performance of truth and less of magic, Sebastian De Souza as Erhart Borkman offers a short contribution but has impact, Clare Higgins as Gunhild Borkman gives a supportive contribution, Daisy Ou as Frida Foldal, is charming and a brilliant pianist, Michael Simkins as Wilhelm Foldal has charm and wit, Ony Uhiara as Fanny Wilton is short and sweet, Lia Williams as Ella Rentheim gives the performance of the evening in her sweet bitterness and determination. No export September 24 – November 26/2022

CURRENT

London Theatre reviews

CORONET

***SARAH by SCOTT MCCLANAHAN director/adaptor OLIVER REESE lights STEFFEN HEINKE composition JÖRG GOLLASCH costume ELINA SCHNIZLER musical adaptor GEORGE RIGBY with JONATHAN SLINGER scott

Blanche Marvin Critique

Well produced and performed. Especially interesting piece for the Coronet Theatre to produce. Enclosed are other critics' reviews.

Guardian (*) Written by Anya Ryan**

Based on the 2015 semi-autobiographical novel *The Sarah Book* by Scott McClanahan, this is a modern all-American tragedy, spiralling in slow motion as a love story goes wrong. In West Virginia, Scott and Sarah fall for one another. But once Scott turns to alcohol, grows increasingly paranoid and tries to excite his mundane marriage with fights about "nothing and everything", life in paradise starts to sour. Companionless on stage, Jonathan Slinger transforms into Scott and all of the story's supporting characters slickly. With a pitch-perfect twang, he pungently delivers Scott's lines. "I was the best drunk driver in the world," he says, as he shares a story of winding through empty roads intoxicated in his "death car" while his children wail in the back seats. Slinger twitches as he recalls ignoring his family's tears. Scott knows he can be horrible. But, does that make it all fine?

Adapted and staged by the artistic director of the Berliner Ensemble, Oliver Reese, the drama unfolds on a set that is more functional than expressive. At first the stage is bare; a fridge is used to store costumes, a carpet rolled out to signify a scene change. By the close though, it has morphed into a mess that mirrors the disaster of Scott's life which is "falling apart" he says, standing within the chaos. The dialogue sometimes lags. Scott's efforts to get Sarah's attention are progressively less surprising; there are poems, pretend suicide attempts, and camping out in a Walmart car park. The music, composed by Jörg Gollasch, gives poise to this tale of an ordinary man's collapse which is otherwise hackneyed in its execution. Through a subtle country-rock score, we're taken into the beer-can-stuffed apartment Scott shares with fellow middle-aged divorcees, the empty highways, and a loud strip club. Here is a picture of a lonely, pathetic man, just living – and despite his all-round unpleasantness, you can't help but pity him. 18 Nov - 17 Dec

CURRENT

London Theatreviews

CORONET

***TRISTAN AND ISOLDE by SABURO TESHIGAWARA and RIHOKO SATO music RICHARD WAGNER choreography/lighting/costume design SABURO TESHIGAWARA artistic collaborator RIHOKO SATO technical coordination SERGIO PESSANHA lighting operator THOMAS LEBLANC wardrobe MIE KAWAMURA production KARAS production, tours EPIDEMIC dancers RIHOKO SATO, SABURO TESHIGAWARA

Blanche Marvin Critique

The majestic then subjective moods of this interpretation in the dance form of Tristan and Isolde was a unique experience that will be well remembered. Enclosed are other critics' reviews.

Dance Art Journal: Written by Paula Riofrio

The lighting sculpts the stage as it is revealed before our eyes. The dancers become a sensuous spell that tells of the time of Tristan and Isolde. Tristan lies across a blue rectangle formed by light coming from a side of the theatre. Detached from him, enters Isolde surrounded by a medallion light that blooms her sadness, mute. The expressiveness of their looming emotions is decrypted in their eyes and movement, essentialist organic movement and physical theatre blur into one another giving birth to a new language, similar to those in which souls must speak. Devout and mystical, their sensuous language is no longer an exploration but a trace that carries experiences, memories and sensations, ever transforming the vivid fire that built the theatre around us before the lights turn on. Saburo Teshigawara and his lifelong collaborator, Rihoko Sato, composed a duet to be performed as spontaneous reorganisations of their vocabulary developed in the counted tempos of Wagner's first *eine Handlung*, musicalised drama. Teshigawara's perceptual organisation started from the outside -to- the inside, as his first encounter with art took shape within sculpture and painting, and only later in his life, it was nourished by movement with classical ballet training. Sato, on the other hand, started in gymnastics at a very young age, and later on in her 20s she became curious about dance as a way of communicating herself, as a way to know her measure and meaning, looking first into her insides to then reflect about and around the outside. Yet both coincide with the idea that inside the body there is a universe; it is perhaps the reason why Tristan and Isolde generates an *animus* – *anima* soul language, a dialogue between two existences that conform one another. Wagner's 1859 Tristan and Isolde composition creates a sublime storyline for Teshigawara's rendering. The strings played in cellos, violas and violins find their place in the muscle fibres that allocate the quivering hearts of the audience; we see Isolde playing the instruments with every movement, her arms and steps do not mark a tempo, they live through the story that music utters. Her enchantment in waves and spins reveal to the heart how to remember fervent love, and its evanescent calmness. Swiftly, the hands of both lovers become a medium for synesthesia to arrive. The voice of Tristan merges with the light. Isolde becomes ethereal, turns into music. The arp, the english corn, both surround the bodies into the same rapture of feeling, brimless emotions and no love lost. As a landscape is being drawn, dandelion yellow and cold ocean blue lights contrast one another, rhythmically constructing the stage in unison with Wagner. Dandelion yellow lightly caresses her face and colours her aura. Cold blue, as the ocean sailed in search for Isolde, he strives to endeavour a way in his movement to make his way back to her. The cast of shadows that kept them apart finally opens; they fumble no more. They rejoin with chaotic persistence, their limbs become reincarnated spirits as in a trance, they multiply and eternize, into an unconfined land. Movements are questions to make one another: they fell in love, fell irremediable and irrevocably in love. Isolde is on the floor, awakened by the hands of her beloved. His magic spell brings her back to life. Both their bodies become possessed by the fervent currents of the ocean ruled by the full moon. The light opens and closes. Tristan walks his final path, facing the backcloth, shoulders to the audience, he gives a last goodbye, but before it all ends: he retrieves attention to his hands, as holding the treasure of a lost memory with unconfined happiness. Isolde, closing her arms undernead the dim blue light, finished the show with a silent clap; the audience witnessed the disappearance of her open chest after their last embrace. 2-10 June

CURRENT

London Theatreviews

CORONET

****HOW IT IS (PART 2) by GARE ST LAZARE IRELAND writer SAMUEL BECKETT producer GARE ST LAZARE IRELAND, THE CORONET THEATRE with THE EVERYMAN (CORK) director/designer JUDY HEGARTY LOVETT composer MEL MERCIER, IRISH GAMELAN ORCHESTRA lighting SIMON BENNISON music performer MEL MERCIER, THE IRISH GAMELAN ORCHESTRA, CATHAL ROCHE, CLAUDIA SCHWAB text performer CONOR LOVETT, STEPHEN DILLANE

Blanche Marvin Critique

This unique company portrayed Beckett at his best with the thrilling sound of their singular voices. Enclosed are other critics' reviews.

Whats On Stage (***) Written by Mark Valencia

The Ireland-based troupe Gare St Lazare is dedicated to "unlocking the mysteries" of Samuel Beckett's prose, and therein lies a problem. As this dramatised account of *How It Is* (Part One) shows, the mystery, once unlocked and set free from the printed page, withers and dies, usurped by theatrical effect. Beckett wrote his three-part novel *How It Is* in 1961, the same year as his play *Happy Days*. The two works share a common theme: the determination to live even when condemned to an appalling and inexplicable confinement. While the latter's Winnie is buried neck-deep in sand, the nameless narrator of *How It Is* is a nowhere man in a nowhere land, doomed by who-knows-who to crawl through mud in pitch darkness with only a sackful of tinned food to sustain him. The experience of reading Beckett's original novel, which he shaped as a stream of semi-consciousness in short chunks with no punctuation and little narrative form, is cumulatively shattering. It reduces the human condition to a near-abstract: a homeopathic life, a blotted memory of things past, present and future and a parable of existential survival. The circular narrative is compelling, its repetitions hypnotic, but it is shot through with bolt-upright lines like "an opener and no tins I'm spared this time tins and no opener". Rather than stage this interior monologue as it unfolds in the mind's eye – an impossible task – director Judy Hegarty Lovett summons up the dark arts of theatre to illustrate a reading of it. Palls of smoke catch Simon Bennison's endlessly resourceful lighting designs; subwoofings from composer Mel Mercier growl and lower; actors Conor Lovett and Stephen Dillane misdirect the audience by materialising and vanishing all over the stalls and circle of Notting Hill's old Coronet cinema. (Lovett's spectators sit on chairs at the front and face out into the dilapidated auditorium.) Essentially, though, the actors' task in a prodigious feat of memory is to stand and deliver the dense, 40-page first part of *How It Is* and to punctuate it on the fly by means of vocal inflexion. For the first hour of the unbroken 110-minute duration Lovett chats to the audience confidentially, like a storyteller sharing craic in a pub; then Dillane takes the reins for a more histrionic and thesp-ish run-in. Occasionally the two actors share the spoils so that one of them is on direct-address duty while the other hisses or mutters the same words off the beat. For a spell Mercier joins in too, which makes for a trio of (intentional) near-gibberish. You may find yourself beguiled by it and entertained, although it will help if you have time to read the novel beforehand. But – crucially – I doubt you'll be moved. From the privacy of one's own eyes Beckett's printed words dig talons into the psyche, whereas the extraneous effects in this audio-visual onslaught ensure interest but keep emotion at bay. It's a case of look but don't be touched. 20 April-7 May

CURRENT

London Theatreviews July 27/2022

BRIDGE

***THE SOUTHBURY CHILD by STEPHEN BERESFORD director NICHOLAS HYTNER producer BRIDGE THEATRE, CHICHESTER FESTIVAL costume YVONNE MILNES décor MARK THOMPSON sound GEORGE DENNIS lighting MAX NARULA with ALEX JENNINGS david highland, RACHAEL OFORI naomi highland, JO HERBERT susannah highland, PHOEBE NICHOLLS mary highland, HERMIONE GULLIFORD janet oram, JOSH FINAN lee southbury, SARAH TWOMEY tina southbury, JACK GREENLEES craig collier, HOLLY ATKINS joy sampson

Blanche Marvin Review

The stage of the Bridge theatre is adjustable to every production and is an open stage for all. It is set in a remote coastal parish, in the home of the vicar who is frequently drunk and with high-handed determination. He takes a hard line with a bereaved parishioner and finds himself isolated from town people. Even his own family begins to fracture, and his marriage starts to fall apart. David Highland, the vicar, must face the future that not only threatens to eliminate his position in the town but everything that he stands for. Despite all this turmoil, there is beneath it all a dark comedy in exploring the base of family life, a community where threatening divisions of society and its rituals. The direction of Nicholas Hytner is clean, clear, and sharply to the point. His forte in gaining performances from actors shines brightly in this production. Mark Thompson's set Max Narula's lightning and George Dennis' sound distinguish the location of a remote coastal village. Nicholas Hytner is also very adept at staging various styles of acting areas and manages to convey the mood of this dark comedy. Alex Jennings as David gives his usual proficient performance and captures the essence of the character and his range of emotions. Phoebe Nicholls as his wife Mary offers great sympathy in the characterization of the neglected wife. Rachael Ofori and Jo Herbert as David's daughters bring an earnestness to the anxiety and frustration to his daughters. Josh Finan as Lee Southbury gives a very stirring performance with enormous credibility. All the remaining characters are masterfully enacted. This production was first produced at Chichester and then transferred to the Bridge. July 1 - August 27

CURRENT

London Theatreviews

CORONET

***WHEN WE DEAD AWAKEN by HENRIK IBSEN adapter/director KJETIL BANG-HANSEN producer THE CORONET THEATRE, THE NORWEGIAN IBSEN COMPANY costume/décor MAYOU TRIKERIOTI composer PETER GREGSON lighting AMY MAE with ANDREA BRÆIN HOVIG maia rubek, ØYSTEIN RØGER arnold rubek, RAGNHILD MARGRETHE GUDBRANDSEN irene von satow, JAMES BROWNE ulfhejm, LUISA GUERREIRO nun

Blanche Marvin Critique

An extremely interesting interpretation of Ibsen's *When We Dead Awaken* performed both in English and Norwegian. It was a fascinating experiment in understanding Ibsen from his source. Enclosed are other critics' reviews.

Guardian (**) Written by Mark Lawson**

In the last year of the 19th century, when Henrik Ibsen began a new play, his family – reports Michael Meyer's biography – feared he would not finish it. Perhaps already weakened by the vascular illness that took hold soon after *When We Dead Awaken*'s completion, the writer was agitated, rushed. The play is Ibsen's shortest and like Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, to which it alludes, can be seen as an artist's farewell. Norwegian sculptor Arnold Rubek returns, with his disappointed younger wife Maia, to a favoured resort hotel where they encounter Irene, model for the marble masterpiece that made Rubek rich and revered, and Ulfhejm, a primally direct bear-hunter, who might have wandered in from *Peer Gynt*. That echo is one of multiple textual self-references: Rubek's sculpture is, like the manuscript in *Hedda Gabler*, a surrogate child. Elsewhere, a remembered child and a mysterious lady reference *Little Eyolf* and *The Lady from the Sea*. Combining subtitled Norwegian with some scenes in English (representing the distinct dialect of the bear-hunter, powerfully played by James Browne), Kjetel Bang-Hansen's production for the Norwegian Ibsen Company, a glorious cultural exporter, plays on and around a Beckettian heap of debris designed by Mayou Trikerioti. This encourages the reading that the characters may be dead, revisiting people and scenes in a sort of *Groundhog Night*. Although Ibsen couldn't have known that the 20th century would see him as the second greatest dramatist after Shakespeare, Rubek's clear sense of his work having been wrong and wasted feels upsetting. The critic Edward Said, in his last book, *On Late Style*, used *When We Dead Awaken* to counter the common view that artists at the end achieve serene expertise and reconciliation: Ibsen, a great revolutionary of theatrical realism, seems determined in this play to explode theatrical convention again. Øystein Røger's Rubek compellingly walks the tightrope between artistic arrogance and doubt, and captures the sculptor's monkish wariness towards women, equally wary of Ragnhild Margrethe Gudbrandsen's earthily dangerous Irene and Andrea Bræin Hovig's floaty but knowing Maia. The older woman seems to represent art, the younger life, both abused and ruined by Rubek. The actors, delivering often heightened lines with an attractive naturalism, communicate the emotions so clearly that the subtitles often feel like mere underlining. February 24 - April 2

*emptyspace*STUDIO

CURRENT

London Theatreviews

JERMYN STREET

***THE MASSIVE TRAGEDY OF MADAME BOVARY! by JOHN NICHOLSON director MARIEKE AUDSLEY
décor/costume AMY WATTS lights CHRIS MCDONNELL sound MATT EATON with JENNIFER KIRBY emma bovary,
SAM ALEXANDER charles bovary, ALISTAIR COPE homais/others, DENNIS HERDMAN leon/others

Blanche Marvin Critique

The actual result of this production was sadly misplaced because the leading lady was miscast as a naïve young woman who becomes sophisticated in her extenuating new life. The tragedy of her ending does not hit hard as usual when reading the book itself. Enclosed are other critics' reviews.

Guardian () Written by Kate Wyver**

A gentle chuckle is never the aim of a great farce. But this rewriting of Flaubert's 19th-century novel rarely induces a proper belly laugh. With the script bogged down in overly apologetic exposition, it's never clear whether *The Massive Tragedy of Madame Bovary!* is making fun of the book, revering it, or trying to find new meaning within it. Flaubert's novel of a French countryside doctor and his freedom-seeking wife was touted as a masterpiece of realism. John Nicholson's play reaches for the opposite, valiantly trying to mine humour from this desperately sad story. The set is hand-drawn in a cartoonish style, the cast speak directly to us and they break character to consider whether anyone in the audience has actually read the book. Marieke Audsley's production lacks confidence. Nudges towards playfulness aren't pushed far enough, nor are the dramaturgical attempts to grapple with the story's tragic ending. Outside the bizarre framing device of two rat-catchers, here to use up all the arsenic before *Madame Bovary* can get to it, the majority of the show is little more than a sped-up run through the plot: Emma (Jennifer Kirby) is reluctantly married to the sweet and gormless Charles (Sam Alexander), but eternally trying to escape her current situation by sleeping with any handsome man who crosses her path (all played by Dennis Herdman). The cast work hard with what they're given. Kirby is proud and exasperated as Emma, always needing something more. The other three rotate around her, running on and off the stage in an assortment of waistcoats and hats to sort one role from another. Alistair Cope is particularly malleable as a pharmacist turned nun turned sparkingly stropky cow. But there is a flatness to the script that robs it of full-bodied comedy. A sense of surprise is lacking throughout, the wordplay is laboured and the physical comedy feels sloppy, so their knowing glances are unearned. The aesthetic comedy is best when they lean into the DIY approach, embracing the creativity that silliness breeds, like drawing a gramophone on a board and the music only playing when the needle appears in chalk. Here is the wit, the timing, the creativity that is missing throughout much of the rest. 17 November – 17 December

JERMYN STREET

****ORLANDO by VIRGINIA WOLF adapter SARAH RUHL composer ROLY BOTHA director STELLA POWELL-JONES décor CECI CALF lights ALI HUNTER costumes EMILY STUART with TAYLOR MCCLAINE orlando, TIGGER BLAIZE, ROSALIND LAILEY, STANTON WRIGHT chorus, SKYE HALLAM sasha

Blanche Marvin Critique

An exciting and inventive interpretation with great imagination in the production. Enclosed are other critics' reviews.

The Guardian (****) Written by Arifa Akbar

A list of pronouns for each cast and creative member in this production arrives before opening night. It tells us that Taylor McClaine, the actor playing the show's titular character, uses they/them, which feels apt for an adaptation of a story about gender fluidity from 1928. Orlando reminds us that the idea of multiple selves is not a modern invention. Virginia Woolf's hero who turns into a heroine during the story is also a time traveller. Woolf's thrilling fantasy of liberation from time and gender constraints begins in the Elizabethan age and ends in the 20th century, Orlando voyaging through it rakishly, having affairs and heartbreaks along the way. McClaine turns out to be perfect casting: arch, fresh-faced and puckish with a flame of red hair. This is a dinky version of the story that ekes out every last delicious drop of wit from Woolf's text, as well as the voluptuous beauty of her language. It is an incredibly faithful adaptation by Sarah Ruhl, a feat in itself given the production lasts only 90 minutes. Stella Powell-Jones's intelligent direction gives the show a self-conscious sense of story-building. The book's biographical voice is turned into joint narration between the five cast members, who double up in roles and include Tigger Blaize, Skye Hallam, Rosalind Lailey and Stanton Wright. Each is as sharp and mischievous as the next. Initially it has the spirit of a parlour game but who can begrudge that when it is so smartly and slickly done? The drama becomes better as it loses the slightly starchy archness and builds on its joyful humour, which is sometimes delightfully physical. Ceci Calf's set design creates an almost childlike spirit of make-believe; there is a miniature version of a stage on the set, naively painted, with curtains swinging open and sound effects made by the cast at times (Roly Botha's sound design on the whole is excellent). Ali Hunter's lighting design showers it with yet more magic and Emily Stuart's costume design is profound. Orlando appears in Elizabethan ruff and knee-breeches at the start but then puts on period frocks and trousers. Despite their playfulness, the onstage costume changes underline not only the passing of time but also how feminine or masculine dress defines us. As Orlando says, it is the clothes that wear us and not the other way around. Femininity and masculinity themselves are, in this world, as slippery, unfixed and multiple as the clothes that are slipped on and off. "Who am I?" Orlando says towards the end, and then realises, ecstatically, that there is no single "I". 28 April-28 May

JERMYN STREET

****CANCELLING SOCRATES by HOWARD BRENTON director TOM LITTLER décor/costumes ISABELLA VAN BRAECKEL lights WILLIAM REYNOLDS sound MAX PAPPENHEIM, ALI TAIE with JONATHAN HYDE soctrates, ROBERT MOUNTFORD euthyphro, gaoler, HANNAH MORRISH xanthippe, SOPHIE WARD aspasia

Blanche Marvin Critique

The unique turn of events as beautifully produced and directed opened one's eyes and ears to the delights of Greek drama. Enclosed are other critics' reviews.

The Guardian (***) Written by Arifa Akbar

Howard Brenton's play about the last days of Athenian philosopher and gadfly Socrates comes at a moment when playwrights seem increasingly to be seeking out the parallels between the ancient Greek world and our own upset modern society. Featuring a convincingly otherworldly Socrates in Jonathan Hyde, this is a rich play of ideas, elegantly directed by Tom Littler, and following in the tradition of Plato's dialogues to give us some fine examples of the Socratic method. There are question-and-answer discussions on meaty subjects around the unexamined life, the clash of old and new orders and the ideal of democracy in principle, along with its failures in practice. Brenton's script combines the ancient and modern so well that everyday profanities sit next to talk of slaves (ever so subtly ironised) and big philosophical ideas to create sparky, bathetic moments. Socrates is condemned to death by a jury for sacrilege and rationalism, essentially, in his questioning of the gods. The people, led by a young upstart, have strains of intolerance, and cleave to "certain" values above Socrates' questioning in clear, clever parallels to today. It is an accomplishment for a play whose action comes in philosophical discussion and in which dramatic speeches are only ever reported, that it does not feel static or sleepy. Isabella van Braeckel's set is striking in its minimalism (a few pillars, a wall frieze). William Reynolds' lighting is exquisite; and sound designer Max Pappenheim, who is also a classicist, writes a great mini-essay on ancient Athenian society in the playtext, too. What drama there is alongside the ideas feels arresting, fiercely intelligent and full of risk but not satisfyingly complete – like scenes from a play rather than a play itself. Although we believe in Socrates as a philosopher, we never quite believe in him as a man choosing death on principle, over family, children and life. He walks towards his end, blithely philosophising, right until the cup of hemlock touches his lips and even afterwards as he wavers between life and death. There is, though, some very fine acting that brings the ideas to life and plays the comic lines perfectly. Socrates' fellow Athenian, Euthyphro, is played by Robert Mountford as a pompous religious stickler. Doubling up as the "gaoler", Mountford is so good in both roles that he near enough upstages the lead. There are also the women in Socrates' life – the mistress, Aspasia (Sophie Ward) in a face-off with the wife,

Xanthippe (Hannah Morrish) – who are so fascinating you wish for greater focus on them. Surely Aspasia, an influential thinker in this male-dominated space, deserves a play of her own? Their fight for the love of the same man is turned into a heated debate on family versus public life, which never entirely convinces but is fascinating nonetheless. At times, the modern world, and its terms, seem too obviously grafted on, even in Socrates' titular "cancellation": his is a death sentence that does not amount to the same thing as social media "cancellation" at all (or was Jesus cancelled, too, and the likes of Galileo?). So too, the talk of Socrates as a dinner-party-throwing elite figure and "the great unwashed" who condemn him and who are clearly today's populists. It is ultimately its discussion on democratic rule that brings the most depth and complexity: Socrates finds himself interrogating his belief in the rightness of the majority vote, and as questions around the ancient Athenian democratic process hang in the air, the unspoken spectre of the Brexit referendum is there alongside them. 2 June-2 July

CURRENT

London Theatreviews sent Sep 13/2022

JERMYN STREET

****LOVE ALL by DOROTHY L. SAYERS director TOM LITTLER décor LOUIE WHITEMORE costumes ANETT BLACK lights CHRIS MCDONNELL composer TOM ATWOOD with BETHAN CULLINANE mary birch, EMILY BARBER lydia hillington, ALAN COX godfrey daybrook, KAREN ASCOE judith mintlaw/stella coppingham, DANIEL BURKE michael selby, LEAH WHITAKER janet reed, JIM FINDLEY henry Norton

Blanche Marvin Review

The unpredictable world we currently live in may become a permanent condition. At least theatres are generally running in a normal manner with here and there a press night being delayed, or an actor running ill with Covid and a production is then canceled that very night. Having gone back to a quasi-normality regarding the viruses, we are now faced with transportation strikes and the trauma of even arriving or leaving the theatre. So the energy and strength it takes to cover theatre, concerts, dance performances, exhibitions are beyond normal and life no longer has an easy flow. The general dying of an era is added to all of this as the digital world descends and rules with a mighty hand.

The repertory system as a training ground for at least 3 years, after drama college, allowed actors, directors, dancers, musicians, technicians to perform all over the country where 3 shows a day could be scheduled. The classics, Shakespeare, and contemporary plays were part of the repertoire. It also created and perfected an interplay between the play (script) and the actor which was the dynamics the audience looked forward to as an emotional means of communication. Not having the experience of apprenticeship in repertory theatres for actors, directors, designers, or technicians is a loss in the creating of an art form. Today actors go directly from drama schools into television, which is another form and style of acting (naturalistic or conversational), and, after having created a television name, they then perform in theatres. Today, miked actors do not project any energy or emotional depth. Add to that, the staging being undermined by the sound systems that are set up in most of the theatres and where actors must perform in speaking directly out front to the audience. Any upstage or sideway speaking is usually inaudible. However, there are some theatres who have wonderful sound systems and you can follow the text. But in actuality, it is mostly difficult to follow the text or the emotions of the actors. The experience of serious communication, therefore, in going to the theatre, becomes dubious with the additional lack in play structure where exposition is usually the first act and left only to the second act for any action. Therefore, I am in a state of pure joy in seeing Love All in an intimate theatre of 120 seats (Jermyn Street Theatre), where the actors aren't miked and yet we are given a full energetic performance which can be heard without depending on any sound system. Hearing and seeing this 1930s play is once again a fulfilling experience, achieved by the old-fashioned means. Oh, the joys of theatre-going once again.

Dorothy L Sayers' battle of the sexes is a light comedy where three women are either wife or lover of a novelist who wants his wife to be dedicated only to himself and his work. Although, it is not a deep analysis, the light touch of conflict offers a charming evening in the theatre. The story centers around Godfrey, a bestselling romance writer, who has left his so called dull wife Edith for a young talented actress Lydia and is awaiting the divorce papers in order to marry Lydia. The couple is living in Venice, where Lydia is bored and mosquito bitten while disconcerted over the delay in the divorce. Godfrey seems to be blocked in his writing but still claims that Lydia is his creative inspiration. Both Lydia and Godfrey, in order to sort out their lives, sneak away separately to London in order to settle the divorce issue. Lydia is also exploring acting again after meeting up with an old actress friend. Godfrey in his contact with Edith suddenly discovers that she has changed into a celebrity writer herself and meanwhile Lydia has become enthused in revitalising her stage career. As a result of Lydia's transition, she comes face to face with Edith where the two women actually discuss the issue of divorce with honesty and concern over the resolution of the situation. How Godfrey ends up and how the women manage to sort out their lives adds to the humour of women's lib. The fact that Godfrey is left to the inspiration of the secretary without love and the women concentrate in determining their own lives, make for the happy ending. Acts II and III in London are far more activated as the activity of London colours their lives quite differently than the lulling atmosphere of Venice. The play is not only full of situational comedy but there are so many catchy one-liners to add to the pleasure of a professional art form. The escape, that each of the women makes from their relationship to Godfrey, is the core of the humour and the play's theme.

The fact that the play is in three acts allows for surprising changes in the characters and story line. Act I sets up your characters, Act II sets up the action of the women and their determination, Act III is the continuity of the storytelling and its resolution. Since many of the old repertory and west end plays follow this kind of temperament and gentle protest, it has an impact, without any distractions. Drawing-room comedies filled with all

these varied romantic misunderstandings until true love wins out may seem corny, but the fact that Dorothy Sayers is more interested in female characters finding their fulfillment in work rather than romance was an important step in 1939. Tom Littler has a flare for the classics and in taking this 1930s comedy, has directed it with a lovely flow of humour, performed by the entire cast with warmth and energy. Bethan Cullinane (Mary, Godfrey's secretary), Emily Barber (Lydia), Alan Cox (Godfrey), Karen Ascoe (friend Judith, secretary Stella), Leah Whittaker (Janet Reed wife turned playwright), Daniel Burke (actor Michael) and Jim Findley (manager Henry) are all excellent and colourful in evoking their character. Its cleverly designed by Louie Whitmore who actually recreates 1930s Venice as well as London. Anett Black's costumes are beautifully styled. Love All in its flavour is a period piece which works with charm for today. The entire cast and fluid direction of Tom Littler make his final production at Jermyn Street a sweet and fun-loving finality. Export for Off Broadway September 8 – October 8

CURRENT

London Theatreviews sent Oct 4/2022

JERMYN STREET

*** SOMETHING IN THE AIR by PETER GILL directors PETER GILL /ALICE HAMILTON set /costumes ANETT BLACK/NEIL IRISH sound HARRY BLAKE lights JAMIE PLATT with IAN GELDER colin, CHRISTOPHER GODWIN alex, JAMES SCHOFIELD nicholas, SAM THORPE-SPINKS gareth, ANDREW WOODALL andrew, CLAIRE PRICE clare



IAN GELDER colin, CHRISTOPHER GODWIN alex,

Blanche Marvin Review

Peter Gill is a special writer/director who captures atmosphere and characters in a gentle manner that slowly reveals itself. There is always a sense of clean clear concentration in the staging and in the designed setting. Some of Gill's plays like *Small Change* or *The York Realist* are extremely moving and have a serene sadness to them. You always know that the environment crowds in upon the character.

He carries through on these qualities in this new work, perfectly suited to the Jermyn Theatre and its audience. Gill has monologues for each of his characters and only at few times do they exchange words, Each one in his or her own world weaves an intricate, poignant picture. The two elderly homosexual men, sitting side by side in home for the aged, ponder over the long-lost loves of their youth. Alex and Colin communicate without needing to explain, and have managed the bonding in this care home with complete commitment, comforting each other in few words. They spring to life when they talk about their past, each ignoring the son or niece that has dutifully come to visit. Neither Alex's son nor Colin's niece talk to one another, nor are they concerned over their lack of communication with uncle or father. Only the imaginings of the old men as their younger selves become animated. They speak caringly but sparsely to each other: each one comes alive in their memory, addressing the long-gone loves of their youthful London lives. The younger selves are full of expectations and eagerly embrace life. The old men live via their memories. When the son and the niece have fulfilled their duty, they pack up their papers and quietly exit.

Something in the Air relies upon feelings and though short, it has depth. It's a study of aging, painting a picture of the richness of memory, and how brightly remembered lives can shine. There's also a lack of significance, about the people remembered - neither Alex's son nor Colin's niece know that the men being referred to as "an old friend" were significant associates.... now recalled as ...something in the air. The sharing of things past works extremely well in an intimate theatre, especially one near Piccadilly Circus. As to the two young men, who were recalls of past lovers... Alex met Nick at a dress party - "dressed as a choir boy" but chose a stylish woman, instead; while Colin in breaking up with Gareth, remained until Gareth's death from Aids.

Peter Gill and Alice Hamilton sensitively co-direct the six gifted actors who offer an enchanting sextet of fluidity, weaving subtly, moving gently, they trace the dialogue round the shadows of recall. Sometimes the density is overcooked, breaking the delicate mood as one loses continuity. Claire Price's light touch and Andrew Woodall's darker temperament paint accurate images while James Schofield's Nicholas, and Sam Thorpe-Spinks' Gareth, vary in their expressive movements which are affected by the memory of things past. Ian Gelder as Colin and Christopher Godwin as Alex master the stepping stones of past and present from one memory to another, defining each change of mood. Jermyn Street Theatre has once again produced the right piece for this mini theatre which draws you into the emotional content of the plays. You hear and see acting of quality, sets with imagination, and staging of professional standing. Export for fringe theatre. October 13 – November 12

CURRENT

London Theatreviews

ASHTON HALL, FRINGE

***HAMLET by WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE adaptor/director/choreographer PETER SCHAUFUSS composer ETHAN LEWIS MALTBY décor BEN M ROGERS with IAN MCKELLEN, JOHAN CHRISTENSEN, PETER SCHAUFUSS, LUKE SCHAUFUSS, STEFAN WISE, EDINBURGH FESTIVAL BALLET

Blanche Marvin Critique

Though this is not the most successful of experiments from Ian McKellen it is still fascinating to find yet another interpretation of the Hamlet tragedy. Ian McKellen expands concepts and the character of Hamlet. Enclosed are other critics' reviews.

The Guardian (*) Written by Mark Fisher**

McKellen is the only speaker in Peter Schaufuss's eccentric but witless adaptation of Hamlet as narrative ballet. Might we be missing some of Hamlet's advice to the players? Did Shakespeare's words of wisdom get lost over the years? Perhaps, for example, there was a bit that went: "Whatever you do, don't try this as narrative ballet – even when you've got a knight of the realm in the cast." Such a tip would have spared us this eccentric staging by director and choreographer Peter Schaufuss, whose Edinburgh Festival Ballet has taken residence in a freshly kitted-out St Stephens. His big draw, of course, is Sir Ian McKellen, who first played Hamlet at the Edinburgh King's in 1971. Now at 83, he is a little on the old side for the student prince, despite his recent starring role in an age-blind production at the Theatre Royal, Windsor. He would make an even less likely classical dancer. Instead, he gamely turns up to deliver a greatest-hits mix of Hamlet's speeches, while dancer Johan Christensen, in matching costume, mimes his way through a 75-minute version of the tragedy. McKellen, as you would expect, gives the part the full orotund treatment, his echoing voice carrying the weight of morose old age, rather than impetuous youth, while a floppy-haired Christensen writhes about the big thrust stage. Good on him for continuing to treat the fringe as a place for experiment, but this is boil-in-the-bag Shakespeare with all the nutrients sucked out. Aside from McKellen's speeches, the rest, as we should have predicted, is silence. The large Schaufuss company does the whole thing in mime, every emotion signalled, every gesture underscored. You get the high-contrast plot points, but none of the textual subtlety and no sense of why such a pantomimic version should be told.

Entirely lacking in wit (and I include a bouncing Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in that), it has an aesthetic straight out of the 1950s – all doublet and hose, brooding poses and bombastic score. The chorus trots around with folderol enthusiasm while the solos, with their flowing arms, high kicks and billowing skirts, could have been lifted from a Kate Bush video. The closing fight is refreshingly dynamic, but it comes too late to offset the enterprise's crassness. 4 August-28 August

CURRENT

London Theatre reviews

UNION

***GHOSTS ON A WIRE by LINDA WILKINSON director PK TAYLOR composer JACK BAXTER costume PENN O'GARA photographer/graphic design MARTIN BUTTERWORTH artist ADRIAN CHAPPELL projection design CHRIS LINCE with GERRI FARRELL octavia hill, ANDREW FETTES william shelfer, TIMOTHY HARKER william blake, ALI KEMP sarah shelfer, DEBORAH KLAYMAN harriot yorke, TOM NEILL michael faraday

Blanche Marvin Critique

A fascinating production where imagination overtakes the reality. Enclosed are other critics' reviews.

Broadway World (*) Written by Cindy Marcolina**

Commissioned by Southwark Council, Linda Wilkinson writes a historically accurate account layered with fiction that explores the strings attached to progress. Author Mary Shelley, William Blake, and human rights activist Octavia Hill coexist in this tonally odd piece, playing ghosts in each other's lives. Ghosts on a Wire introduces a ruling class that puts industry over humanity. Humble pub landlords are driven out of the city due to the smoke and noise of the plant that's been annihilating their businesses and people dye on the streets. PK Taylor directs the meticulous look at pre-turn of the century Southwark. The timelines interlace smoothly, but a general lack of stage chemistry and an overly unnatural expositional text make the show a bit clunky. A cast of six doubles as toffs and workers, discussing the philosophy of London's industrial trajectory and the birth of new unions. This duality, at times, comes off as farcical in comparison. The social responsibility towards the poor is a central issue with Hill's battle for fair housing and green spaces. Gerri Farrell comes up short, unfortunately coming off under-rehearsed. Implied as a lesbian, she shares a home with her companion Harriot Yorke, played by a much younger Deborah Klayman, who's also Mary Shelley. A ghostly presence clad with a long cloak and an eerily deadpan vibe, Klayman haunts both timelines in spectral fashion. 21 September-8 October