

# Mays tells of his have-a-go efforts in real-life sting

**D**aniel Mays is a Crouch End stage and screen actor starring in *The Same Deep Water As Me* at Donmar Warehouse. Here, he tells us about the play and answers our questions.

**Daniel:** *The Same Deep Water As Me* is a brilliant new play by Nick Payne who had a West End hit last year with *Constellations*. It's set in Luton, in a small fry solicitors firm called Scorpion Claims, who deal with insurance claims and exist in the world of "No win, no fee". It's a two-man outfit run by Barry, who runs the firm, and my character, Andrew, who has returned to Luton to care for his dying father. Andrew has failed in becoming a big shot lawyer in London so he finds himself washed up in the place he has longed to escape from. Kevin, an old school friend of Andrew, manages to rope him in to a "crash for cash" scam for easy money.

It's about stepping over the line into criminality and the lies we'll tell to those around us to survive. The strength of the play is that it deals with the times we live in. The recession, struggling to make ends meet – the writing is hilarious and moving in equal measure. All the characters are fantastically drawn by Nick Payne who is a wonderfully new and exciting talent.

**In the past, you've played incredibly hard-hitting characters like Adam, a heroin addict in the BBC drama *Rehab*, and Danny in *Motortown*, a Simon Stephens production at London's Royal Court Theatre. What is it that attracts you to such extreme roles?**

Hard-hitting and extreme is definitely how I would describe

the majority of parts I've played. I guess every actor has to play to their strengths to some extent. I enjoy playing those roles and asking questions about why people behave the way they do. Any character that takes me and an audience on a journey, that tests our preconceived ideas about a subject matter and challenges the way we see the world we live in is all I can ask for really.

**Many people know you as the dark DCI Jim Keats in *Ashes To Ashes*. How was it playing someone who had to go up against the iconic Gene Hunt? Were there any challenges playing that particular character?**

DCI Jim Keats remains one of my all-time favourite roles to date. I had an absolute ball playing it. As soon as the writers asked me if I'd consider playing the devil to Phil Glenister's Gene Hunt it was like "where do I sign?" There was a lot of pressure in that Jim Keats would reveal the answers to not only *Ashes to Ashes* but *Life on Mars* also. Plus I was going toe-to-toe with the Gene Genie! But I just loved the fact he was disguised as a discipline and complaints officer. A wonderful group of actors that welcomed me with open arms.

**Returning to the play's 'crash for cash' basis for a moment – have you ever conned someone or been conned in a particularly unusual way?**

I've never used a personal injury lawyer in my life, but a group of guys tried to con/mug me once at a cashpoint on Oxford Street. They placed a £10 note on the floor as if I'd dropped it and then took my bank card when I bent down to retrieve it. Stupidly



■ Daniel Mays (standing) with Nigel Lindsay and Monica Dolan in *The Same Deep Water As Me*

Picture: Johan Persson

## Killer one-liners but play only skims the surface

**THE SAME DEEP WATER AS ME**  
Donmar Warehouse  
★★★★☆

**P**laywright Nick Payne set an astronomically high standard with last year's award-winning quantum-physics rom-com *Constellations*, but his follow-up, a jocular dig at the "no win, no fees" claims culture, is disappointingly slight.

Inspired by the increase in sham compensation appeals, Payne creates a believable scenario in which fraud becomes overwhelmingly tempting for struggling personal injury solicitor Andrew (solid Daniel Mays), who moves back to home town Luton after his career stalls in London.

His partner in crime is wide-boy school friend Kevin (played to almost pantomime comic effect by Marc Wootton), who enlists

a ragtag band of accomplices, including his wife – and Andrew's school crush – Jennifer (soulful Niky Wardley). Their scheme operates successfully under the nose of Andrew's boss Barry (underused Nigel Lindsay), until one of their targets fights back.

Payne's strength is his sensational comedic instinct. The play is packed with killer one-liners, quirky observational wit and delightful running gags, from exotic teas and class-based refreshments to volatile desk fans. Director John Crowley keeps the action hurtling along – speeding past the structural problems – and a uniformly excellent cast add entertainment value.

The show operates best as an ensemble farce, with strong support from remarkable Monica Dolan, doubling as a cagey cabbie and Sloane Ranger solicitor,

and Peter Forbes and Isabella Laughland scene-stealing as an idiosyncratic judge and mouthy driver respectively.

But the hasty emotional climax feels tacked-on and unearned: the attempt to engineer a heartfelt romance is rushed and the fight for Andrew's soul curiously muted. For a morality tale, it's short on moral dilemma.

Nor, crucially, is there enough exploration of the roots of this culture. Kevin shiftily name-drops Big Society, tax-dodging corporations and Lehman Brothers to excuse his actions, but there's no real discussion of who's to blame for this muddled sense of entitlement and recessionary moral corrosion. *The Same Deep Water As Me* is content to paddle on the surface.

Until September 28.

Marianka Swain

I held my own, but I did get the card back plus the £10. Job done!

**You've got a broad portfolio, having worked on huge productions like *Pearl Harbour* and *Atonement*, as well as critically-acclaimed British independent films like *Vera Drake***

**and *Made In Dagenham*. If you had a choice though of starring in any film from the past that you haven't been in, what might it be?**

That's a tough question. I'd say any movie directed by Martin Scorsese starring Robert De Niro. Both had a massive influence

on me when I started to think really seriously about acting and making a career out of it. *Goodfellas* has to be right up there. Or *Apocalypse Now*. After watching *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse*, I think that boat would be the only place to be!



■ Aerial performers with one of the puppets

Picture: Roberto Battista

## Puppets whisked on a magical aerial adventure

**LA TEMPESTA**  
Queen's Wood  
★★★★☆

**A**rchway-based aerial theatre company Scarabeus have teamed up with Jackson's Lane in Highgate and puppetry experts Little Angel Theatre in Islington to stage a thoroughly charming open-air show for pre-schoolers.

Seated on a tarpaulin in a glade in Queen's Wood, my two-year-

old was spellbound by the trio of performers and their beautifully crafted puppet alter egos.

The slim storybook tale of a loving family of mum, dad and cheeky daughter, living in a seaside home, then caught in a violent storm and set adrift on a raft, switches from left to right as puppets and humans alternate its telling.

Dialogue-free and set to an evocative soundtrack of Italian music, there are magical interactive moments in this

40-minute show, when we help to save the family plants from the storm, or when the sea – a cloth of deep blue silk – comes over our heads. Suspended on a trampoline strung between the trees, the aerial human performers, attached to bungee-like ropes, are bounced and tossed on their raft before – to my five-year-old's delight, plunging underwater for a swim with the sharks and fishes.

Like the story, the effects are simple but delightful.

Bridget Galton