



## Delusional dictator's wife parties on dance floor

**HERE LIES LOVE**  
National Theatre – Dorfman  
★★★★☆

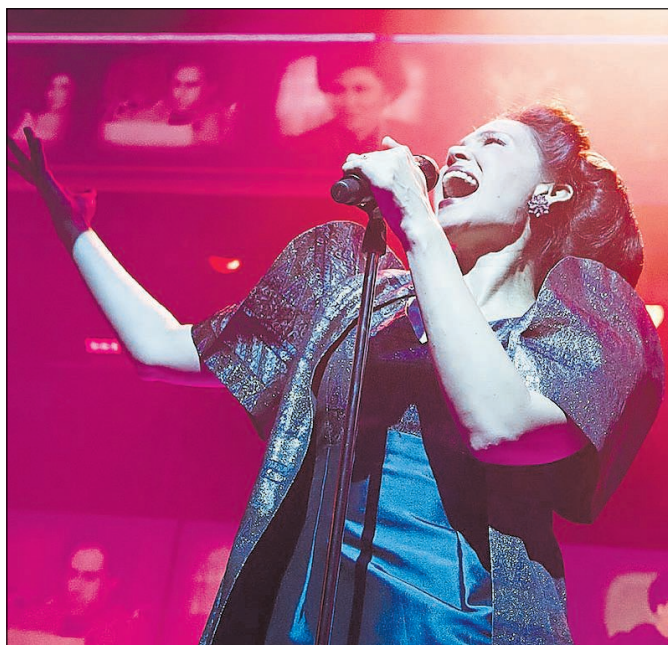
With an *Evita* revival running in the West End, there seems a trend for musicals about despotic, spendthrift self-styled women-of-the-people who married international leaders.

Like the Rice/Lloyd Webber offering, this boogie through the life of Imelda Marcos by musician/composer David Byrne and DJ Fatboy Slim offers dazzling costume changes, a sung-though score of uplifting melodies and an anti-heroine with a cold, ambitious heart.

Taking inspiration from Imelda's love of disco dancing, the newly refurbished Dorfman Theatre – formerly the Cottesloe, now with better toilets and bigger bar – has been converted into a nightclub. Audience members can sit in the gallery or throw shapes on the dancefloor, shepherded by pink-jumpsuited bouncers as shifting catwalks and rostra are used to perform upon. At one point we're even taught to line-dance.

In a tightly-choreographed enjoyable camp fest that borders on the glib, Alex Timbers' slick direction fast-tracks us from Imelda's modest origins in the 1940s via beauty pageant success to first dating senator Ninoy Aquino, then future president Ferdinand Marcos.

As the story turns darker – Imelda pops pills to deal with the public attention and marital infidelities – the couple's popular presidency turns to dictatorship with extravagant spending, the declaration of martial law, and imprisonment



■ Natalie Mendoza dazzles as Imelda Marcos in *Here Lies Love*

Picture: Tristram Kenton

and assassination of opposition leader Aquino.

Natalie Mendoza is seductively dazzling as Imelda, ably supported by a slick-haired Mark Bautista as Ferdinand Marcos and Dean John-Wilson as a poignant Aquino who bravely returns from exile to his death.

### Towering ego

And Peter Nigrini's evocative projections on multiple screens offer images of real life figures that remind us of Imelda's towering ego and the Marcos' globe-trotting courtship of world leaders.

From the programme notes Byrne means to criticise America's complicity in the saga

and pay tribute to the bravery of the Filipino people for staging a peaceful coup against the Marcos in 1986.

But the lack of dialogue, coupled with the relentlessly throbbing disco beat deny quieter moments to explore either political or emotional complexities.

We hear almost nothing from ordinary folk about what it's to live in a dictatorship, nor do we get a window on the inner life of the increasingly delusional Imelda. Oddly there's barely a mention of shoes.

For all its dazzle design and energy, *Here Lies Love* leaves you as empty as its heroine's heart. *Until January 8.*

## Small budget – but they'll be big on screams

Ingenious shows will have audiences on the edge of their seats, writes **Nathalie Raffray**

Lovers of all things spine-chilling and ghoulish should get down to Camden Town's Etcetera Theatre for the fortnight-long *London Horror Festival*.

Now in its fourth year, visitors can expect the unexpected from the 15 different shows on offer incorporating theatre, comic horror, radio plays and film.

"Horror by its nature often requires a lot of money for special effects, prosthetics, elaborate sound and lighting – so producing

effective and successful horror theatre on a small budget is a real skill and art," says producer Peter Davis. "The ingenuity and talent from the festival companies this year is outstanding and really establishes horror theatre on the London fringe scene."

*Ladybird* (Oct 23), inspired by local writer Lisa Appignanesi's book *Mad, Bad and Sad: A History of Women and the Mind Doctors from 1800 to the Present*, tells the story of three women who have been institutionalised in an asylum to protect society and



■ *Ladybird* tells the story of three women in an asylum



■ Mind reader, magician and hypnotist Sean Smith

## Issues of skin colour and status are explored with real insight

**THE HOUSE THAT WILL NOT STAND**  
Tricycle Theatre  
★★★★☆

In Marcus Gardley's 1830s New Orleans-set play, the ghost of a murdered European colonist threatens to bring down his property and his bereaved mixed race mistress and daughters. But there are few cracks evident in the buoyant UK premiere of this lyrical, witty and wildly unpredictable play.

Fusing magic, music and even voodoo, Gardley hones in on the issue of skin colour and status and brings that into the present with a fierce clarity. Under French and Spanish rule in the Louisiana territories, it became common practice for male European colonists to take enslaved African women as mistresses or common-law wives. A unique system of

placage emerged in which mixed race mistresses and their children could negotiate for property, money and education. Here, mixed race matriarch Beartrice (Martina Laird) was colonist Albans' (Paul Shelley) placee. While their three daughters are born free, their shades of skin colour promise different social destinies: the oldest Agnes "is the colour of butter", the middle Maude Lynn "is white as milk" and the youngest Odette is "brown as oatmeal". With Albans' corpse freshly laid out in their living room (an impressive dummy oppresses throughout), the daughters fight for their right to attend the annual New Orleans ball where they hope to bewitch a man who will liberate them from their mother's house rule. But just as in Lorca's *House of Bernarda Alba* (Gardley's main inspiration), freedom is hard won.



■ Michele Austin, Ronke Adekoluejo, Danusia Samal, Ayesha Antoine and Martina Laird in *The House That Will Not Stand*

Picture: Mark Douet

The mix of righteous fury and despair, the literary allusions and race issues could all make for a tough night out but this play is bursting with playfulness and shrewd, humane insights. It's quite something to see a cast of such strong female characters battle it out on stage, playing up the social mores, while undercutting the hypocrisies with catty exchanges that would put

Scarlett O'Hara to shame. Laird is a revelation and Tanya Moodie brings a heartbreaking dignity to the role of maid Makeda. Yes, the blend of the supernatural with camp comedy sometimes jars but director Indhu Rubasingham pulls the contrasting elements together with great energy and ultimately seals the right balance. *Until November 22.*

Caroline David

## Period piece stripped back to shed light on human truths

**OUR TOWN**  
Almeida Theatre  
★★★★☆

The heartfelt message of Thornton Wilder's iconic 1938 play is delivered with stunning directness in David Cromer's unadorned revival. Wilder's fourth-wall-busting piece endeavours to communicate the truth of what it means to be human by limiting theatrical artifice – an aim honoured by Cromer's intimate, immersive staging, in which house lights stay up and actors wander freely through the audience.

Often played as a mistily nostalgic paean to small-town America, Cromer's *Our*



■ **Twins Macabre: *Small Mediums at Large*** tells the story of siblings with a penchant for murder

themselves, while tomorrow (Oct 24) there's an exclusive screening of short horror films – *Horror Shorts*. The winner of a competition for best original short horror film will be announced on the night.

If you like a little magic with your horror tales then mind reader, magician and hypnotist Sean Smith should have it all in his show *Folklore Unto Himself* (Oct 25-26).

Smith presents a collection of his favourite British folklore which he believes is the root of our horror tradition. From horseshoes to hag stones, the Green Man to the Black Shuck, discover the ancient stories that speak to our deepest fears.

Award-winning theatre troupe The Off-Off-Off Broadway Company bring old-school chiller *Peaceful* (Oct 27-28) to the festival, based on the

true story of Sarah Winchester, the widow of a gun magnate who was responsible for San Jose's infamous Winchester Mystery House. The show is set on the evening of a seance in a rambling labyrinthine mansion as exotic medium Mr De Villiers helps owner Ethel Charles to make peace with the ghosts she believes are hunting her.

#### Twisted sketches

Rounding off the festival is I'll Be Right Back's reimagining of Christopher Marlowe's deal-with-the-devil drama *Faustus* (Oct 29-31), set in the cut-throat corporate world, and *Small Mediums at Large* (Oct 30-31), a dark comedy last seen on BBC 3's *Live at the Electric* and a hit at the Edinburgh Fringe in August.

The Twins Macabre are

10-year-old psychic siblings Maurice and Ivy, who have a penchant for finger painting and murder. Having run away from the circus, the pair lock their audience in the Playroom Prison and conjure the souls of the damned through twisted sketches and comic songs.

Expect a fast-paced black comedy laced with vaudevillian theatrics, maleficent spirits, demonic party games and moments of genuine horror – just the ticket for Halloween.

The festival of horror is sponsored by the British Library in conjunction with their *Terror and Wonder – The Gothic Imagination* exhibition and runs until October 31.

■ For full listings, times and prices, visit [londonhorrorfestival.com/whats-on/](http://londonhorrorfestival.com/whats-on/)



■ **Laura Elsworth, David Cromer and David Walmsley in *Our Town***  
Picture: Marc Brenner

*Town* instead strips away period dressing that might act as a barrier: Alison Siple's costumes are neutral contemporary and performers use their natural accents. New Hampshire settlement Grover's Corners may be evoked with dogged deliberateness, but this production balances specificity with resonant universality.

Cromer himself plays the metatheatrical Stage Manager, narrating and directing the action with dry matter-of-factness, like a jaded flight

attendant pointing out fire exits. The effect of this artlessness – Wilder's preferred "understatement of sentiment" – and Stephen Dobay's minimalist set is to stimulate our imagination and demand a rewarding level of engagement.

Similarly unshowy performances communicate emotional undercurrents with admirable restraint. Laura Elsworth's Emily is refreshingly spiky, while David Walmsley is fearlessly unfiltered as her puppyish

suitor. Anna Francolini and Kate Dickie evoke the weary domestic grind, Richard Lumsden displays deft timing, Annette McLaughlin lands a hysterical cameo, and Christopher Staines' depressive choirmaster delivers both Jonathan Mastro's expressive music and a genuinely disquieting beat.

The absence of props results in some dubious mime, and allowing the story to drift into a more contemporary realm makes the gender politics problematic. Yet this quietly sincere piece is a striking microcosm, homespun philosophy masking deeper wisdom. Wilder argues for the preciousness of inconsequential moments, and in asking what makes a life and how we might be remembered, *Our Town* is startlingly profound in its seeming simplicity.

Until November 29.

Marianka Swain

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