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# Henry's comedy lacking in originality but has charm

## Radio show transfer reminiscent of Steptoe and Son

**RUDY'S RARE RECORDS**  
Hackney Empire  
★★★★☆

Following a deluge of film-to-stage transfers, *Rudy's Rare Records* takes a more unusual route from Radio 4 sitcom to semi-musical theatre. The cosy formula remains intact – creaking plot mechanics more apparent in a meandering two and a half hours – but the addition of timely topics and uplifting live music results in pleasantly irresistible entertainment.

Lenny Henry (co-creator with Danny Robins) is Adam, aspirant yuppie returning to his native Birmingham following a failed acting career and messy divorce.

His elderly father, first-wave Jamaican immigrant Rudy (Larrington Walker), is doggedly defending his vinyl haven from the twin threats of digital downloads and “gentrifying” developers, while negotiating a fraught romance with local laundress Doreen (Lorna Gayle).

### Melancholy

Henry generously plays nerdy straight man to Walker's scene-stealing, incorrigible rogue, their dynamic more than a little reminiscent of *Steptoe and Son*.

Adding to the intergenerational conflict is Adam's student son Richie (Joivan Wade), whose shocking revelation is the catalyst for affecting family drama.

Rudy's reminiscences with Trinidadian florist Clifton (Jeffery Kissoon) are similarly stirring, banter tinged with wistful melancholy.

Conversely, the humour is broad and mostly too benign, though a few gags contain real barbs.

There's some deft, perceptive commentary on multiculturalism and racial typecasting, impassioned views leavened by wit.

Throughout, a “rehearsing” reggae band supplies backing tracks that occasionally open up into fully performed covers – best is Gayle's diva-licious *You Don't Love Me*, aimed at commitment-phobic Rudy. However, Paulette



■ Lenny Henry, left, plays the straight man to scene-stealing Larrington Walker

Randall's flat, unimaginative production never fully commits to an innovative musical format; both material and presentation play too safe.

Yet what Rudy's Rare Records lacks in originality, it makes up for in heartfelt, old-fashioned

charm. How apt that a show championing legacy and community should so effectively recall our comedy heritage while offering a genuinely inclusive experience.

Until Sunday.

Marianka Swain



■ Peter Davison is Oliver and Thusitha Jayasundera plays the role of Nadia in *The Vertical Hour* at the Park Theatre

## Intellectual war debates reflect undercurrent of family tensions

**THE VERTICAL HOUR**  
Park Theatre  
★★★★

The continuing relevance of David Hare's *The Vertical Hour* (premiered in New York in 2006) was emphasised as the press night was last Thursday – the eve of the vote in the Commons for a third campaign of military action in Iraq.

A packed audience was enthralled at this examination of the justifications, or as Yale professor Nadia would say “imperatives”, for going to war interwoven with some heavy duty, north Londonesque late night dinner table conversation examining familial relationships.

The opener to the play is the rather chilling audio of Bush's announcement to the world of the 2003 invasion.

We then find ourselves in Nadia's seminar with the equally chilling Dennis (played with disarming honesty by Cameron Cuffe) – a disciple of the End of History school of Political Economy and the victory of neo-liberalism. The scene delivers lots of laughs and a strong underlying comment on the state of the States.

Then, across the pond, to a peaceful English garden in Shrewsbury.

Oliver is waiting to greet his transatlantic son and new partner – Nadia. Civilised sparks at once fly between the urbane Oliver and the in-your-face Nadia (played with pace, energy and great sensitivity by Thusitha

Jayasundera) and it is not long before they start sparring on the whys and wherefores of invading Iraq.

For those of us of a certain age who read Shaw's *Major Barbara* for O-Level, there are strong echoes of the central scene between the eponymous major and her father, Lord Undershaft – including the age difference of the central protagonists.

But, here in Shrewsbury, the plot thickens with liberal doses of post-Sixties' guilt and Noughties' pragmatism.

The dialogue is sparkling and at times laugh-out-loud funny.

Peter Davison (as Oliver) is a brilliant, understated, sly womaniser gradually realising that the hunt is dwindling to an end and that he has nothing to show for it other than rather a lot of guilt.

The final scene, the shortest, sees Nadia back in Yale and dealing with a young under-graduate (the assured Pepter Lunkuse) threatening to jack her course in. In what could be her final essay, Terri writes about the USA going to Iraq and concludes that to understand it, all you have to do is to understand that this is simply what bullies do.

This rather parallels Dennis' earlier views and knocks the legs out from under the sophistication of Oliver and Nadia's theories. Out of the mouths of babes...

A totally absorbing theatrical experience with David Hare at his best.

David Winskill

## Carefully crafted tale of playwright's busy life has intimacy and impact

**THE SILENCE OF SNOW**  
Old Red Lion, Islington  
★★★★☆

Playwright and novelist Patrick Hamilton may not be a household name but here we can witness a true life tale of the artist, not just as a young man, but as an older one.

Hamilton's work first came to prominence in the early 1920s with a CV boasting the hit plays *Gaslight* and *Rope* – the latter was turned into a landmark film by

Alfred Hitchcock – and his novel *Hangover Square*.

But while he lived a life of marked success and artistic triumph, he was left haggard and broken by the ravages of a hectic life. It led to an untimely death in 1962 at the age of 58.

In a charismatic one-man play by writer/performer Mark Farrelly, *The Silence of Snow* is a careful melding of biographical detail and sympathetic infusions of Hamilton's penmanship.

This may sound like a risky and difficult tightrope to walk, but

Farrelly has thoughtfully interwoven these two facets with utmost care and consummate skill.

As we journey through Patrick Hamilton's life, we learn of the harrowing impact of both real and metaphorical car crashes, burgeoning alcoholism, parental indifference and complicated love.

Insistently regaled with a self-awareness, this is personal and intimate theatre delivered directly at the audience and is all the more impactful as a result.

It is aided by incisive content that is funny, but also sad, and a

wickedly discerning delivery. Above all, Farrelly parries the fine stitches of biography with a meticulous balance between pathos, humour and poignancy.

It is a thoroughly compelling hour's worth of theatre from a notable talent.

The short running time proves concise, but thoroughly satisfying.

Greg Wetherall

■ *The Silence of Snow* runs until October 11.



■ Mark Farrelly in *The Silence of Snow*