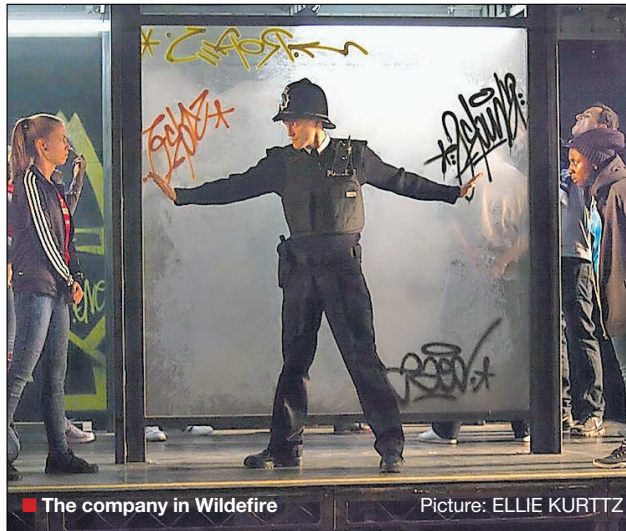


Drama takes urgent look at state of Met

WILDEFIRE
HAMPSTEAD THEATRE
★★★★☆

'When are you lot going to understand you ain't nothing,' thunders the voice of disaffected youth to a rail-roaded policewoman in *Wildefire* - Roy Williams' uncompromising play about the crumbling state of the Met.

One of the UK's most prolific and fiercely political playwrights, Williams stakes out the historical context in the opening scene: Sir Robert Peel recites the nine principles of law of enforcement, written in 1829. The narrative then hurtles into the present - a buzzing, chaotic police headquarters where cynical Vince [Cian Barry] is questioning a suspected rapist. Vince's interrogation style - a mix of coercion and mind-games - is met with constant interruption by idealistic new policewoman, bright-eyed Gail Wilde - nicknamed 'Wildefire' [Lorraine Stanley]. *Wildefire's* pure motives are quickly corrupted and she is no match for the brutalizing environment of her workplace or ruthless amorality she encounters on the streets - the lies, double bluffs and violence that play out between the met and gang



■ The company in *Wildefire*

Picture: ELLIE KURTZT

members.

Marketed as a thriller, the genre is never quite earned despite director Maria Aberg's best efforts to make the multiple-scenes overlap with theatrical foreboding. As menacing, hooded gang members crawl out of the darkly lit, industrial set by Naomi Dawson, *Wildefire's* meltdown becomes a metaphor for the disintegration of the met as a civic ideal. A keynote of gallows humour underpins much of the acute dialogue as characters

spit with anger and frustration, loading their recriminations with police slang. The plot is not novel; *Wildefire's* disintegration is too swift and strays into the territory of generic imploding TV detectives. It's relentless viewing. But then, that is Williams' point. *Wildefire* is an urgent look at the role of the met following the London riots which we all need to address. Fortunately, a cautious optimism prevails.

Until November 29

Caroline David

Thriller asks big questions

PENTECOST - PART OF THE IRON CURTAIN TRILOGY
Cockpit Theatre NW8
★★★★☆

Twenty-five years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, David Edgar's 1990s Iron Curtain Trilogy is staged together for the first time, offering wry, nuanced dramatisation of political and social upheaval. Middle play *Pentecost* addresses post-Soviet reconstruction and the complexity of heritage via an insightful art detective thriller.

In a small Eastern European country, curator Gabriella Pecs (Hope Hynes Love) shares a potentially revolutionary find with English academic Oliver Davenport (Marc Carver): a church fresco that could pre-date Giotto and thus reveal a new starting point for the Renaissance. If confirmed, it would rewrite history, but waspish American Leo Katz (Brian Linden) is determined to unpick their theory.

Edgar's meaty, cerebral script asks big questions. Should

such a discovery be completely restored? Or does the more recent work overlaying it, marks of bitter experience, have equal value? Competing factions furiously negotiate: duelling Catholic and Orthodox priests argue sanctity, while the cultural minister sees tourist goldmine and Pecs knows it could boost the self-esteem of her oft-occupied nation, now establishing an identity but besieged by Western hegemonisation.

In the less focused second half, debate segues into hostage crisis - a transition Jerome Davis's otherwise solid production doesn't quite land. Armed refugees demanding asylum share their grievances, the painting

becoming metaphor for those buffeted by rival forces: the worth of art versus the price of life.

There are strong performances from the trio of academics, Tim X. Davis's genial minister, Julie Oliver's magistrate and Jeanine Frost's agitator, finding the humanity in this play of ideas. *'Pentecost'* refers to the Holy Spirit making the Apostles' different languages universally comprehensible, and Edgar's thoughtful exploration of multicultural fluidity and linguistic interpretation is almost Stoppardian. *Pentecost* is not just precious cultural artefact, but shrewd contemporary provocation. Until November 30.

Marianka Swain



■ Cast members of *Pentecost*

Picture: JASON DAIL

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