

Reviews : Theatre

Kidman play is pure theatrical mogadon

PHOTOGRAPH 51
NOEL COWARD THEATRE
★★★☆☆

It's hard to make science dramatic, and Michael Frayn's Copenhagen this is not.

The reuniting of director Michael Grandage with the star wattage of Nicole Kidman 17 years after *that* 'theatrical viagra' moment appears to have blinded some (male) critics to this poorly characterised, dry stick of a play.

Anna Ziegler's reclaimed herstory of Rosalind Franklin, narrated (ironically?) by the men who leech off her, features a cold, humourless heroine whose meticulous work photographing cells was effectively stolen by Crick and Watson to discover the structure of DNA.

Methodical always-right old Rosalind would never speculate or publish until certain. But her collaborator, bumbling chauvinist Maurice Wilkins (Stephen Campbell Moore) showed them the eponymous revelatory photograph they needed for their blue sky thinking. The trio scored the Nobel Prize, while Ros died in obscurity aged 37 from ovarian



■ Nicole Kidman as scientist Rosalind Franklin pic: Johan Persson

cancer.

Ziegler's bid to right that wrong casts the men as cartoonishly sexist while suggesting Franklin's struggle to be taken seriously - by her father and an institutionally sexist scientific community - necessitated a distant steely determination.

While Christopher Oram stunningly evokes the bombed-out remains of King's College where Franklin toiled, and a poised, controlled Kidman,

drably dressed in bluestocking stout shoes and a brown gown, does her best with slim pickings, 'I must get on with the work' 'can't they see, the proteins are on the outside!' none of it adds up to layered characterisation, formal daring or thrilling dialogue.

Ziegler's tell don't show style also fatally fails to explain the wider resonance of discovering what one character calls 'the secret of life'.

Bridget Galton

Dystopian vision thrills

POMONA
NATIONAL THEATRE
TEMPORARY SPACE
★★★★☆

Last year, new Orange Tree artistic director Paul Miller electrified his theatre by programming Alistair McDowall's brilliant and brutal dystopian thriller. Now it occupies the National's Temporary space, with most of its excellent original cast intact.

The title refers to an island in the centre of Manchester that "looks like the world'll be in a few thousand years". That's where Ollie hopes to find her missing twin sister, who may be the victim of organised crime, either prostitution or grisly organ harvesting.

Ollie's quest is folded into McDowall's dazzling, stubbornly elusive maze-like structure. Reality, sci fi and fantasy blur until there's no refuge left: the monsters are real, and they are emerging from the shadows. The mode of storytelling, more than the bleak subject matter, ensures



■ Sarah Middleton as Keaton
Picture: Richard Davenport

spectators are plunged into its nightmarish heart.

Yet this is also a playfully postmodern piece, breaking away from the grimy and grotesque for a winking cultural reference or genre subversion, framed by the Lovecraft-referencing role-playing game that bleeds into life. McDowall asks whether we can really ignore the suffering in front of us by consigning it to a separate space, either the physical island or a fantastical realm. That gains added resonance with the current debates about intervention versus closing off some parts of the world from others.

Ned Bennett skilfully

grounds the wild imaginative leaps, and draws out some indelible performances: Nadia Clifford's distinct twins, Rebecca Humphries' damaged but good-hearted working girl, Guy Rhys's chicken nugget-guzzling oddball, Sean Rigby's troubled hitman, Sam Swann's eccentric loner, and Sarah Middleton's eerily equivocal Keaton, at once sweetly girlish and harbinger of doom.

Georgia Lowe's drain-like set, Elliot Griggs's queasy lighting and Polly Bennett's astute movement direction vitally contribute to this urban horror for the hyper-connected contemporary age

Marianka Swain

New Highgate Steak Restaurant

Rated 5 by  tripadvisor



36 Highgate Hill London N19 5NL

020 3601 3830

www.popeseye.com

SAVE THE DATE

13 / 16 NOVEMBER 2015

HAMPSTEAD
& HIGHGATE
LITERARY
FESTIVAL

AT SOUTH HAMPSTEAD HIGH SCHOOL

BOOKING OPENS 1ST OCTOBER
ONLINE: HANDHLITFEST.COM
EMAIL: INFO@ARTZY.ORG.UK
PHONE: 020 7998 8293

FREE YOUNG READERS AFTERNOON
ON SATURDAY & A HOST OF
FABULOUS AUTHORS INCLUDING
ANDREW MARR, TONY LITTLE,
LAUREN CHILD, FLORA FRASER,
DAPHNE SELPH AND MAX HASTINGS

