

Reviews : Theatre

# Unsubtle Tartuffe update misses target

A WOLF IN SNAKESKIN SHOES  
TRICYCLE THEATRE  
★★★★☆

Last year, American playwright Marcus Gardley scored a hit at the Tricycle by transporting Lorca to 19th-century New Orleans. His loose adaptation of Molière's *Tartuffe* seemed equally promising - the hypocritical religious devotee becoming a Deep South charlatan preacher. But in Indhu Rubasingham's unrelentingly broad production, the original's subversive message is sacrificed for toothless slapstick.

Despite updating to the present Gardley's is an old-fashioned piece, weirdly reminiscent of the creaky sex farce parodied in *Noises Off*. Apostle Toof chases nubile blondes and ineptly hides them from his formidable wife, while the wealthy family he infiltrates in hopes of funding his church are a collection of tired types: tyrannical tycoon, ex-stripper fiancé, Mexican maid, flamboyantly gay son, and daughter parading her newly discovered African roots like an insufferable gap



■ Lucien Msamati as Toof picture: Mark Douet

year student. Subplots collide and fizzle in a breathless stream, characterised by cartoonish eavesdropping, plotting and soap operatic confrontations; like an unsubtle episode of *Empire*, played at deafening volume. There are also dodgy accents and sudden tonal lurches, with Gardley referencing gender inequality, homophobia and - interesting from a real-life son a preacher man - religious disillusionment in the face of an uncaring modern world.

The gospel interludes are enjoyable, as is the musicality of Gardley's rich and rolling verse.. The mighty Sharon D Clarke leads the singing and provides the best scene, a face-off with voluptuous Adjoa, while Lucian Msamati is a persuasively devious Toof. More a mixed bag of sketches than a cohesive play, the pantomime quality means Molière's real target - dangerous reliance on blind faith - emerges unscathed.

Marianka Swain

## A schmaltzy sizzling hit

IN THE HEIGHTS  
KING'S CROSS THEATRE  
★★★★☆

King's Cross, our latest "new city quarter", is an apt setting for this 2008 Tony Award winner, which focuses on New York's Dominican-dominated Washington Heights. The local immigrant population values their close-knit community, but gentrification threatens: as rents rise, the hipsters invade, and businesses and residents are priced out.

Lin-Manuel Miranda's Hamilton is a current Broadway sensation, and this earlier piece shows why. His score is a propulsive, richly textured fusion of hip-hop, rap, pop and Latin: musical theatre for the 21st century. *West Side Story* casts a long shadow, however, and Quiara Alegria Hudes' book can't compete, reducing hardship to Disney fable. There's no drugs or serious crime, and all problems are solved by a group hug and fortuitous lottery win - a dreamy version of the American Dream.



■ Antoine Murray-Straughan as Graffiti Pete pic: Johan Persson

But Miranda's innovative numbers thoughtfully address multicultural identity: how do you define who you are when you're not sure where is home.

Luke Sheppard's Southwark Playhouse production is cleverly reconfigured for King's Cross (played in rep with *The Railway Children*). The sound balance is better, the traverse staging immersive, and Drew McOnie's pulsating choreography remains a big sell. Athletic aerials, racy club salsa, expressive contemporary and silky-smooth partnering grow organically out of the storytelling, while maintaining a freewheeling urban vibe.

Sam Mackay's bodega-owner Usnavi is a charismatic guide, while Lily Frazer and Joe Aaron Reid's star-crossed lovers - one running from Stanford, the other seeking acceptance - provide soulful singing and unaffected performances. David Bedella brings gravitas as her conflicted father, ex-Sugababe Jade Ewen offers a strong presence if strained vocals, and Cleve September smooth moves. But two strong, sensual women dominate: Josie Benson and Victoria Hamilton-Barritt, the latter astonishingly five months pregnant. Schmaltzy, yes, but an irresistible sizzling hit.

Marianka Swain

THE WEDDING, BAR & BATMITZVAH SHOW  
**SIMCHAS**  
*Live*  
Sunday 25th October 2015  
Village Hotel, Elstree  
11am-4pm

Hosted by **Jewish News**  
VILLAGE HOTEL, Centennial Park  
Elstree, Hertfordshire WD6 3SB  
For all enquiries please contact us on  
020 7692 6929 or email sales@thejngroup.com

## Readers of the Ham & High

### trust and value local advertising

Local Media	45%
Television	37%
National Newspapers	33%
Internet	32%
Magazines	17%
Commercial Radio	15%

**Call: 0845 671 4460**  
E: Sales.enquiries@archant.co.uk

Source: NS research