

Reviews : Theatre

Relocated merchant has joy and insight

THE MERCHANT OF VEMBLEY
COCKPIT THEATRE
 ★★★★★

Based on The Merchant of Venice Shishir Kurup's play in suitable iambic pentameters has been relocated to Wembley's Hindu community with remarkable success.

Jeetendra a Bollywood Star wants to marry his producer's daughter Pushpa who has been left an enormous fortune by her late father. Although she has resisted arranged marriage she is respecting his wishes to marry the man who will correctly chose one of three boxes

Jeetendra's friend Davendra will back his new film but must borrow the money as his ships have yet to come in. His businesses are doing well but he cannot put his hands on the cash. So he goes to Sharuk – a Muslim money lender who has just lost his beautiful daughter Noori when she eloped with an African. He is disgusted when he learns she has doffed her traditional dress in favour of a pink wig, fishnets and a miniskirt.

Sharuk makes Davendra sign



■ Emilio Doorgashingh as Sharuk picture: Shyamantha Asokan

a contract saying that if he cannot pay the money back he will forfeit a pound of flesh not from his heart but from a more intimate body part – making him unable to father non Muslims.

The title sounds like a comedy and indeed the first act is full of riotous humour. The drama lies in the second act and illustrates the hatred of Sharuk the Muslim and his desire for what he thinks of righteous revenge. As a minority group he says the more they were

denigrated, the more extreme would be the vengeance.

The surprise of the evening is an enlightening, heartbreaking speech by Kavita, Pushpa's friend arguing for greater understanding between genders and religions, and espousing the Hindu faith's tenet of unconditional compassion.

An imaginative and unusual set blends a film of busy London with Asian carved screens, in Ajay Chowdhury distinctively directed show.

Aline Waites

A whimsical star vehicle

FARINELLI AND THE KING
DUKE OF YORK'S THEATRE
 ★★★★★

Make opera, not war. So urges composer-turned-playwright Claire van Kampen's featherweight historical star vehicle, elevated by husband Mark Rylance – in a tailored role showcasing his beguiling idiosyncrasies – and John Dove's sumptuous production.

Rylance is 18th-century Philippe V of Spain, whose reign is threatened by rumblings of war, an abdication plot, and his descent into debilitating depression. But wife Isabella hopes celebrated castrato Farinelli might restore the king's spirits and sanity.

Though inspired by real events, van Kampen's whimsical piece offers a reductive view of music therapy as magic cure for bipolar Philippe. More interesting, though bluntly spelled out, is the parallel between the "unnaturally" created sovereign and singer (whose ambitious brother butchered his genitals).



■ Mark Rylance as Philippe V of Spain picture: Simon Annand

Trapped by the greatness thrust upon them, the pair escape their fishbowl – yes, there's also a literal fishbowl – and return to nature.

The play's fascination with oppositions – public and private, court and forest, power and helplessness, agony and ecstasy – makes a virtue of Farinelli's dissociative portrayal, with Sam Crane the mournful man and counter-tenor Iestyn Davies his divine voice. Davies' hypnotic arias communicate more effectively than words the soul-stirring power of music. Truly "art for all", though that exhortation lands more ironically in the pricey West End than at the Globe.

Rylance's mercurial monarch is at once petulant, threatening, listless and giddily impulsive, tormenting Melody Grove's steadfast carer Isabella. However, there's richer exploration of that dynamic up the road in The Father; here, it swerves into romantic melodrama. The intersection of medicine and faith is thinly sketched, as are most supporting characters, though Colin Hurley's grumpy librettist amuses.

If not deeply illuminating, it is exquisitely candlelit, casting flickering shadows over Jonathan Frensom's brocade frock coats and oppressive regal portraits. Lavish but limited.

Marianka Swain

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

Hosted by **JewishNews**
 VILLAGE HOTEL, Centennial Park Elstree, Hertfordshire WD6 3SB
 For all enquiries please contact us on 020 7892 6929 or email sales@thejgroup.com

Logos for sponsors: intu Watford, Salt, and others.

mydate24

LET LOVE GROW!

SEARCH FOR SINGLES WITH SHARED INTERESTS at mydate24.co.uk