

Reviews: Theatre

Modern passion in a revitalised Chekhov

UNCLE VANYA
ALMEIDA
★★★★☆

After putting a modern spin on the Oresteia, with memorable results, director Robert Icke takes on another classic. No samovars here: Icke has stripped back, anglicised and revitalised Chekhov, obliterating the space between story and spectator. His zoomed-in vision offers rich, intimate psychology, but it's also naturalism bereft of context – present-day rural England as murky substitute for the remote 19th-century Russian province facing seismic change.

Yet this is otherwise a beautifully detailed, immersive world, unspooling over a quietly mesmerising three-plus hours. Icke masterfully conveys the steady march of time, the inexorable futility of these unfulfilled lives. The farmer's wasted years of unappreciated toil; the ageing professor failing to achieve immortality through second-rate work; the doctor's losing battle against environmental destruction; and the romantic longing never to be sated. Vivid releases; rocking out to Iggy Pop and Bowie; pummelling a



■ Paul Rhys and Jessica Brown Findlay Picture: Manuel Harlan

bouquet of flowers, burn bright, but are swiftly snuffed out.

Icke's effective fragmentary adaptation is composed of lyrical, darkly funny failed communications. When the yearning for understanding grows too great, the actors jump off the stage to deliver naked confessions directly to us. Paul Rhys as the tragic title character is drained, pained and genuinely dangerous, while the white-hot erotic encounter that shatters the stasis of Vanessa Kirby's complex golden girl and Tobias Menzies' comfortably numb doctor lingers agonisingly. Jessica Brown

Findlay's outwardly tough Sonya lays herself open with exquisite hopefulness; Hilton McRae's professor is coolly vampiric; Richard Lumsden offers a resonant running gag, constantly pausing his guitar playing to retune; and Ann Queensberry's nurturing Nanny highlights the family's arrested development. Hildegard Bechtler's revolving set honours different perspectives, but also creates major sightline issues. It's an unnecessary addition to a version that finds resounding contemporary passion in a timeless tale of inaction.

Marianka Swain

Daring but jarring acts

CIRQUE BERSERK
PEACOCK THEATRE
★★★★☆

If circuses exist to make us gasp and suspend our disbelief, Cirque Berserk certainly provides the tricks and turns, but it forgets the beauty and magic.

There were awe-inspiring balancing acts, with handbalancer Kremena supporting herself - just - with unsteady objects piled on top of objects, holding her poise far up in the air.

Acrobat Jackie twisted higher and higher on a single rope, dangling by her hands and feet far above the audience, without a safety net or second chance.

For petrolheads, four men on motorbikes revved up and drove around one another in a tiny white globe, defying collision and life-altering injuries.

It was a traditional circus transported onto the stage with little thought for thematic costumes or backdrops - and

■ Cirque Berserk

without any modern twist or story arc.

In between the performances, including a sickly knife-throwing double-act, a clown performed weak and tiresome jokes which involved tripping over.

The music hyped up the tension until the second act became a never-ending beat of adrenaline-thumping drums.

Tricks from the Tropicana Troupe, a tribal-inspired series of leaps brilliantly timed, were

enough to quicken the pulse - but the music felt cheap.

For such traditional - and mainly first class - circus acts, a big red tent might have created a more powerful and fun atmosphere and there were few moments which allowed the audience to pause and wonder.

The acts and costumes jarred and felt jammed into one another - with little originality, but plenty of flourish.

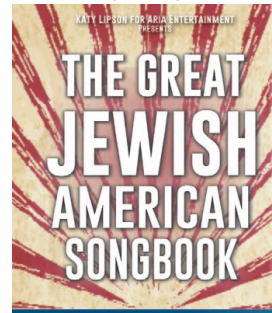
Anna Behrmann



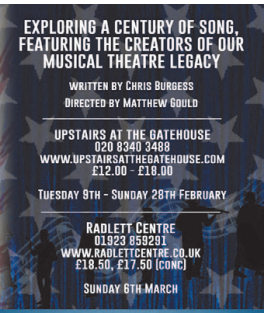
Picture: Piet-Hein



CREATE A SPARK TODAY!
SEARCH FOR SINGLES WITH SHARED INTERESTS at mydate24.co.uk



THE GREAT JEWISH AMERICAN SONGBOOK
On stage for the first time since the original 1978 London production
3rd March - 10th April 2016
Tickets from £14 - £22
020 8340 3488
upstairsatthegatehouse.com



EXPLORING A CENTURY OF SONG, FEATURING THE CREATORS OF OUR MUSICAL THEATRE LEGACY
WRITTEN BY CHRIS BURGESS
DIRECTED BY MATTHEW GOULD
UPSTAIRS AT THE GATEHOUSE
020 8340 3488
WWW.UPSTAIRSATTHEGATEHOUSE.COM
£12.00 - £18.00
TUESDAY 9TH - SUNDAY 28TH FEBRUARY
RADLETT CENTRE
01923 859291
WWW.RADLETTCENTRE.CO.UK
£18.50, £17.50 (CONC)
SUNDAY 6TH MARCH

JOBS MATCHED TO YOUR CV
Look local with jobs24.co.uk



"Witty, ad-libbing bandleader Wallace Fields presents TROIKA, his new dynamic Kabaret show band. Troika drives the audience on an exciting odyssey from the romantic leftbank Paris of the 1930's to the wild steppes of Cossack Russia and into the dark dens of Jewish Odessa of the 1920's....."

Le QuecumBar

42-44 Battersea High St, London SW11 3HX

Sunday 21 & 22 February 2016, 8.00pm

£10 in advance & £13 cash on the door t: 020 7787 2227

info@quecumbar.co.uk

The outstanding musical talents of Paul Gregory (Jazz Manouche Guitar), Matthew Heery (Guitar and Mandolin), Owen Bryce (Trumpet), and Alan Stratton (Double Bass)

provide the audience with an authentic experience, overflowing with the passion and energy of this hugely influential musical period.

For further information: fieldswallace1@gmail.com or t: 07961 365084



Photos by: Ryan Express Photography t: 07742 604820