

Reviews : Theatre

Chaotic Faust mash up; but with Kit off

DOCTOR FAUSTUS
DUKE OF YORK'S
★★★★☆

Pity the Game of Thrones fans who shell out West End ticket prices to bathe in Kit Harington's celebrity glow, and get Jamie Lloyd's chaotic mash up of Marlowe and modern dress.

Even for this seasoned critic it's a hard-going night out as we segue from Elizabethan morality play to Colin Teevan's contemporary updating.

We move from Faustus' student-y suburban semi, where tortured souls spewing black froth pop out of every beige cupboard and dance on the taps – into the flashy celebrity world of a Las Vegas illusionist, who tricks Presidents into writing cheques for the poor.

Lloyd attempted a similar blend of pitch black humour, sexual violence (against women), song and dance routine and satire in Peter Barnes' *The Ruling Class* last year. Though I disliked that too, Harington suffers by comparison with the more experienced James McAvoys who better handled the wild tonal shifts. Uncomfortable



Kit Harington as Doctor Faustus picture: Marc Brenner

with the dialogue of the opening scenes he is also burdened by Teevan's strained grafting of the Faustian pact onto contemporary celebrity. It's not clever or funny enough to supersede the cliché and Lloyd's relish of gore, puke, dildos, faeces and bile with jazz hands jiggling doesn't help.

While never nailing Faustus' inner struggle or the tragedy of his unbreakable vow, he fares better as the tortured soul of later scenes.

The devil, it turns out is a

Scotsman in grubby underpants (Forbes Masson) and the ever-excellent Jenna Russell lends able support – and an interval rendition of Meatloaf's *Bat Out of Hell* – as the nightie-clad Mephistopheles.

Jade Anouka offers the lone empathetic figure as the pure-hearted Wagner who falls for the germ of goodness in John Faustus. But for GOT fans, the only crumbs of comfort are a couple of flashes of Harington's bum.

Bridget Galton

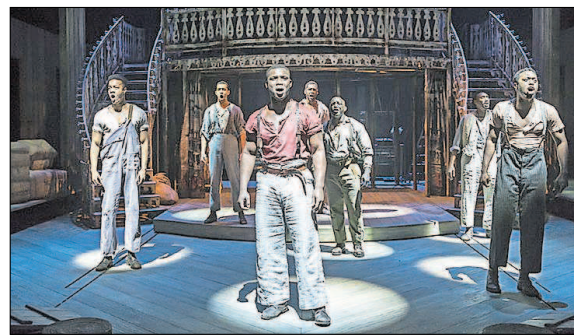
All aboard for a fleet revival

SHOW BOAT
NEW LONDON THEATRE
★★★★★

Racial politics, addiction, violence and economic hardship. The subject matter of Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II's musical, based on Edna Ferber's sprawling novel, shocked on its 1927 premiere, as did its integrated story and score and revolutionary dramatic heft.

Daniel Evans's fleet Sheffield Crucible production wisely uses a filleted version, and Alistair David's vibrant, eloquent choreography helps bridge multiple decades, locations and some erratic plotting. We begin in segregated 1880s Mississippi, where black workers heave bales of cotton under the lash of white overseers. Though the travelling performers of the eponymous show boat peddle escapism, they're directly affected when star Julie is revealed as mixed-race.

Evans superbly balances the showbiz glamour and lurking darkness. Even



The cast of Showboat picture: Johan Persson

Lez Brotherston's boat goes from bright lights and majestic Americana to grimy, rundown vessel. Its three tiers demonstrate someone is always watching, whether in admiration, communion or censure, and provide a Juliet balcony for the swooning lovers.

Gina Beck's loyal, idealistic Magnolia hangs onto her dignity through a testing marriage to feckless gambler Gaylord. Her luscious lyric soprano is beautifully matched by charming Chris Peluso's sonorous tone in a deeply felt romance. Rebecca Trehearn's Julie breaks hearts with two haunting paeans to inexorable love – wry, bluesy, rapturous,



shattering. There are several superb double acts: Malcolm Sinclair's twinkling Andy and Lucy Briers's scathing Parthy; Danny Collins's eager Frank and Alex Young's droll Ellie; and Sandra Marvin's imperious Queenie and Emmanuel Kojó's Joe, who delivers the accusatory "O! Man River" with spine-tingling fervour.

That river rolls on through a changing world, as we witness the difficult birth of modernity. It's a universal tale and a sweeping epic, but this lush revival makes each moment of love, loss, yearning and redemption disarmingly intimate. All aboard!

Marianka Swain

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