

WHAT'S ON THEATRE

REVIEW

Relationships, identity and the generation gap

Imagine living your life in secret for fear of being stoned, thrown from a rooftop or gang raped," says Nick Myles, east London writer and director of London-Damascus, a play about a transcontinental gay couple.

"It was no news to me that life is tough out there for sexual minorities, but the individual stories and details of horrendous persecution and sadistic brutality shocked and distressed me.

"It's gruesome and barbaric and I felt an overwhelming sense of outrage and solidarity, which turned into a sort of creative anger."

That creative anger led Myles to pen the story of Ahmed and Adam who start an online relationship between Syria and the UK, which is to be performed at Untold Stories new writing festival in Kings Cross this weekend.

Presented by Untold Arts, each night presents six new plays that also explore truth and lies, identity and the generation gap.

Festival producer and Hackney Downs resident Mark Lindow's work, I'll Be Along D'reckly, is based on life in his native Cornwall:

"The aim is to show that it's a county of contrasts. On the one hand people see it as a beautiful, dramatic holiday destination. They think Poldark and Doc Martin, but the reality is that it's one of the poorest counties in the country with high unemployment and drug use."

He is concerned by the lack of opportunity for the youth, particularly the "working class Cornish lads who have found



■ Adam and Ahmed in Nick Myles' London-Damascus

themselves priced out of being even able to rent, never mind buy, somewhere to live in their home county".

The idea came when he was watching the local news and saw an item that reminded him of his family.

"My granddad and dad both worked at the dockyards," he says, "but this industry has declined and it made me think about how opportunity in just two generations

has changed dramatically for the young work class in Cornwall."

I'll Be Along D'reckly and London-Damascus are performed on both nights along with Hannah Khalil's Yellow Coat, (Up)Rooted by Jung Sun de Hollander, On Arriving by Ivan Faute and Martin Brett's All of Me.

Tickets for the festival at SLAM, 32 Cubitt Street, from slam.org.uk. Runs February 25 to 26, 7:30pm.

Zoe Paskett

REVIEW

Playful, sometimes bonkers

TRAVESTIES
APOLLO THEATRE
★★★★★

After a hit run at the Menier Chocolate Factory, Patrick Marber's storming revival of Tom Stoppard's 1974 play gets a welcome West End encore. The triumph of this production is the way it honours Stoppard's dazzling intellect while also going full throttle with the piece's playful, sometimes bonkers, wit.

Tom Hollander is Henry Carr, a senile British consular official (mis)remembering his time in Zurich during the First World War. This unreliable narrator allows Stoppard to tweak history, bringing together several pioneering figures who did indeed pop up in Switzerland around 1917: Lenin, plotting his return to revolutionary Russia; Dada founder Tristan Tzara; and James Joyce, in the midst of creating Ulysses.

The form of the play is stunningly refracted through its subjects. There's a bravura pastiche of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, a production of which results in Carr taking Joyce to court, plus impassioned socialist debate, espionage hijinks, Joycean limericks, and scenes slashed and spliced together like Dadaist cut-up poetry.

Amongst this linguistic whirlwind, there are resonant ideas about the meaning ascribed to words like "patriotism" as justification for war, and the duty of artists when faced with social turmoil. If words become unmoored, a mysterious, transporting force, or is that a dangerous indulgence?

Marber's energetic production, featuring superb musical skits and magic tricks (with an assist from Tim Hatley's versatile paper-strewn set), is slickly delivered by a game cast.

Hollander treads a delicate line with his younger Carr, a self-important dandy haunted by his experience in the trenches, while Amy Morgan and Clare Foster provide the evening's highlight with their fizzing passive-aggressive duet. Great support, too, from Freddie Fox's flamboyant Tzara, Forbes Masson's wild-eyed Lenin and Peter McDonald's heartfelt Joyce. Sublime silliness with an all-too-serious core.

Marianka Swain



■ Tom Hollander

Picture: JOHAN PERSSON

REVIEW

Burgess' dystopia hasn't got bover boots

A CLOCKWORK ORANGE
PARK THEATRE

★★★★☆

Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange* is a crucial part of 20th century's canon of dystopian visions of a warped world.

Like *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *Fahrenheit 451*, *The Machine Stops*, *Brave New World* and others, it deals in great political and philosophical questions that, as director Alexandra Spencer-Jones writes "will always be relevant to the time in which we watch, read or perform it."

It is 45 years since Kubrick's film version of the 1962 novel, so it is good that a new generation has the opportunity to view the work.

Action to the World's production is amazing theatre. High octane and electrifying, it follows the sickening antics of Alex and his Droogs as they punch, assault, rape and terrorise their way through the world in a fest of ultra violence. They are captured, imprisoned and Alex is subjected to the government sanctioned Ludovico Technique – a sort of aversion therapy that amounts to emotional castration.

The world created at the Park Theatre is almost exclusively populated by men wearing white vests and men wearing black vests who shun no opportunity to take them off to reveal exquisitely sculpted torsos. The

cast is energetic and the choreography brilliant: fights and assaults, even an anal rape with a broken bottle, becomes both horrific and graceful.

But what of the polemic: the questions of the rights of the individual and the limits to how society should protect its citizens? Sadly, these are all scooted over in seconds. Where the piece lingers over an assault (yes, we get it, there's lots of violence) the questions of choice and volition are (literally) danced over.

And where is Burgess' wonderful, invented language Nadsat? In the book and the film, Alex narrates in this concoction of cockney rhyming slang and

■ A Clockwork Orange
Picture: MATT MARTIN



Russian: it is beautiful and central to the theme of alienation. Here it is, at best, a mumbled adjunct to allow the cast a breather before the next disco/House themed fight – ballet pumps not bover boots. We deserve an appypolly loggy.

The pace was too fast to allow ideas to develop. As a brilliantly crafted piece of theatre the work was compelling; as a vehicle for examining ideas and our humanity, it was trite and superficial.

David Winskill