

ETCETERA

REVIEW

Honours Stoppard's dazzling intellect

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



Tom Hollander in *Travesties*.

Picture: JOHAN PERSSON

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

Have a wild time at this fizzing party

THE WILD PARTY
THE OTHER PALACE
★★★★☆

What's not to like about a night of 'gin, skin and fun'? There's one on offer at Andrew Lloyd Webber's new breeding ground for musicals, currently hosting the UK premiere of Michael John LaChiusa and George C. Wolfe's risqué *'The Wild Party.'* Directed and choreographed by musical theatre's new star Drew McOnie, the show's prohibition era setting and restless, jazzy score pulsate with feral energy. While low on plot, the 1927 source, a scandalous poem by Joseph McClure March, provides the basis of a nuanced look at racial tensions and social aspirations.

Queenie (Primrose Hill's Frances Ruffelle), a fading vaudeville actress, is trapped in a toxic relationship with



Burrs (John Owen-Jones), a clown with a history of violent entanglements with beautiful blondes. To inject some spice, they throw one of their legendary parties in their Manhattan apartment. A mish-mash of thrill-seekers turn up including Jewish impresarios Goldberg and Gold lesbian stripper Madelaine, and Queenie's long-time friend and vaudeville rival Kate (a thrilling ticking time-bomb of a performance by Victoria Hamilton-Barritt).

Structured around a party with a peremptory dose of early morning comedown, the score is performed superbly by Theo Jamieson's sassy

8-piece band that sits above an arch of show-time lights. McOnie embraces the challenge of the dense writing with inventive choreography conveying the continuous whirl of selfish desires, performed with impressive attack by the exceptional cast who occupy every corner of the set's multiple levels. With obvious similarities to Chicago, the pastiche doesn't preclude some heartfelt numbers. Owen-Jones' cuckolded Burrs singing 'How Many Women in the World' is outstanding and Ruffelle's smoky vocals flip from brash to yearning as Queenie's mask slips.

Caroline David

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