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## ETCETERA



**BEGINNING**  
by Eldridge.  
Picture: JOHAN  
PERSSON

# Loss, loneliness and love in Crouch End

## BEGINNING

National Theatre  
★★★★☆

We're in the early hours of the morning, post-housewarming party in Laura's swish new Crouch End flat. The only guest left is virtual stranger Danny. The pair tiptoe around a hook-up, but as they begin to spill secrets, a deeper bond is forged.

David Eldridge's two-hander is deceptively simple: a 2015-set romcom illustrating the well-established notion that the interconnected digital age may actually fuel loneliness. But its form is unusual – a single, real-time scene played over 100 minutes.

That means every awkwardly fumbled connection becomes excruciating, with no scene cut to save them, or us, plus every detail is magnified in Polly Findlay's meticulously crafted, naturalistic production.

It initially seems like opposites attract – metropolitan high-flier versus anxious, bumbling Essex boy. But Danny is actually astute, just scarred from the breakdown of his marriage, while Laura is happy to bond over scotch eggs, fish finger sandwiches and Strictly.

Eldridge's frame of reference is pleasingly precise, from the specific connotations of where you live in London to a particular series of Strictly (Laura

Marianka Swain sees a well crafted rom com that takes place in real time in the aftermath of a Crouch End housewarming party



fancies Jay McGuinness, Danny pro Aliona). Elsewhere the 2015 setting can be laboured, with tired Facebook gags and the dismissal of new-fangled internet dating.

There's also a reactionary element in otherwise sharply feminist Laura's yearning to swap professional success for marriage and children – even as she recognises domestic bliss is often fabricated on social media.

But the pair's sense of loss

and longing is sincere, as are their (often hilarious) pick-up attempts; Naomi Said's dance sequence is sensational. Justine Mitchell and Sam Troughton give warm, nuanced performances, and Fly Davis's post-party, upmarket flat is spot on.

Yet Eldridge's point is that "home" isn't just buying in the right postcode, it's forming connections. Ultimately conventional, but a gentle gem of a play.

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