

British Theatre Guide

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Yes, Prime Minister

Antony Jay and Jonathan Lynn
Chichester Festival Theatre
(2010)

It was in 1980 that *Yes, Minister* first burst onto our TV screens (closely followed by *Yes, Prime Minister*) and from episode one the wit and humour of writers Jay and Lynn gripped the nation and had viewers enthralled and rocking with laughter - laughter tinged with not a little worry and apprehension as realisation dawned that this was the manner in which our representatives were running the country - or not, as the case may be - the power belonging less to the transient elected ministers than to the ever present civil servants.

Appropriately in an election year the writing team are back with this stage version and have lost none of their brilliant satirical wit. The first night Chichester audience lapped it up, listening attentively to every word of Sir Humphrey Applebys extensive and baffling speeches, applauding appreciatively when a point struck home, and laughing uproariously as the ministers and their advisors tried desperately, and ever more ridiculously, to get out of a potential vote-losing situation.

David Haigs Prime Minister is not as bemused and befuddled as Paul Eddingtons original Jim Hacker - much more savvy and more on top of events until, that is, the visiting Kumranistan ambassador throws a spanner in the works and the desperation to extricate himself from a very sticky state of affairs sends him into hilarious overdrive, which he manages brilliantly and somehow without totally losing credibility - a phenomenal performance!

The ambassador with the flying spanner (Sam Dastor) is cool, calm and reasonable (despite being in his pyjamas) as he points out that Kumranistans morality is no better or worse than British morality and what right has one to interfere with the other. He certainly has a point, but his president is demanding the provision of an underage schoolgirl to have sex with him that very night, or the promised 10 trillion dollar loan which would save Europe from disaster would not be forthcoming. The public (the voters) would not understand unless, perhaps, they could phrase the transaction in an acceptable manner - call it patriotic sex perhaps or, as Principal Private Secretary Bernard Wooley suggests horizontal diplomacy.

Is it better for one teenager to be screwed than the whole of the European economy?

Jonathan Slinger is Bernard - just as literal (and literary) as the original but more moralistic - a man torn between what might be good for the country and what his conscience tells him, and the expressions on his mobile face say it all as he tries to weigh morality against expediency.

Suave, smooth Sir Humphrey, with an eye to what is good for himself as well as for the country, is played by Henry Goodman with an astonishing ability to reel off endless speeches without seeming to draw breath. The relationships have changed slightly as the PMs Special Policy Advisor (a confident and competent Emily Joyce) has a say in affairs and Sir H. isnt able to be quite so manipulative as he would like.

There is so much we recognise in this bang up-to-date version in an ever faster moving world with blackberrys making communication available everywhere and anywhere, the BBC quick to pick up on any breaking news, and dont even mention the Daily Mail and what they might print.

Global warming and the money for research to prove its existence, the commercialism of the BBC with ever more repeats and reality programmes, the problem of bailing out Greece, and can it be an illegal immigrant at Chequers who has provided the excellent lunch they have just enjoyed?

Directed by Lynn, it is fast, funny and a rib-tickling sure-fire hit. Only a three week run at Chichester, but I predict a very much longer life - even the programme cover is a brilliant satirical joke.

Running until Saturday, 5th June

Philip Fisher [reviewed](#) this production at the Gielgud Theatre

Reviewer: [Sheila Connor](#)