

# British Theatre Guide

News, reviews, features and podcast on theatre across the UK

## All They Need Is Love

C S Flint

Act Provocateur

Lion and Unicorn Theatre, Kentish Town  
(2007)

There is a long and not always worthy tradition of plays set in mental hospitals. Peter Weiss's *Marat-Sade* conveyed the horror, while a series of plays produced more recently have gone for comic angles and romantic intrigue.

*All They Need Is Love* by Claudette Flint is whimsical, possibly more in the tradition of Harold Pinter's *The Hothouse*, which makes a welcome London return at the National this summer, than Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, if only because of the gently manic absurdity sustained by a company directed by the hard-working and very obliging Dumle Kogbara. If this site awarded stars, he would get a bonus for paring the interval thus ensuring that your critic did not have a 35 minute wait for the train home.

It seems to be a given in so many examples of this genre that the lunatics are no madder than their keepers and at some point will almost certainly take over the asylum.

The play, set in 1955 as Eden takes over from Churchill, revolves around Edward Russell-Grey, played by the impressive Raymond Coker, making his belated theatrical debut playing an octogenarian. There is nothing wrong with his mind, other than a touching devotion to a mysterious Italian lady that was not his wife and a belief that his grandson may not be his but Benito Mussolini's child. Young Ben (Jamie di Spirito) loves his grandpa and in the best *Carry On* traditions smuggles in alcohol in a cod liver oil bottle.

The comedy is largely situational with no greatly discernible plot and focuses on the eccentricities of the patients. Thankfully, for the most part it is affectionate rather than cruel.

They are certainly an odd bunch, with a winning Gill Stoker playing Mrs Tchaikovsky, an ageing ballerina who gives us a nice fairy twirl before explaining that the father of her twins was Josef Stalin. Lloyd Morris is Mr Johnson, a gloomy introvert whose head has been turned by a pools win, protectively kept in a suitcase.

There are then three figures who always seem to appear in plays of this type, the maddest lunatic of the lot (Stephen Eliot-McDonald) who thinks that he is a doctor, as does at least one patient; the high-pitched Christ figure who really was born in Nazareth (Liyo Cassini); and the pretty blonde (Lea Oxley).

For two hours, this mixed bunch have fun and demonstrate an impressively wide level of knowledge about many subjects on the part of C S Flint, who might be advised to consider a little cutting to sharpen up the pace.

This comedy is less raucous than many other plays of this type but leaves one with a feeling of affection for many of the relatively innocent victims condemned to asylums with nothing much wrong with them. Whether today's vogue for care-in-the-community would leave some in the gutter is another question?

**Reviewer:** [Philip Fisher](#)