

# British Theatre Guide

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## Blue Remembered Hills

Dennis Potter

Chichester Festival Theatre production

Theatre on the Fly, Chichester Festival Theatre

26 June–14 July 2012

The inaugural production at the newly-erected Theatre on the Fly gets the venue off to a flying start—almost literally as the first character we see is pretending to be an aeroplane.

The barn-like structure, built from reclaimed materials, has been brilliantly devised by a team of young designers, builders, artists and architects with surprisingly comfortable, well-raked, bench-type seating. In Anna Ledwich's production, the huge doors facing the audience are wide open with the expanse of grass and trees which is Oaklands Park, a perfect setting to evoke the Forest of Dean in 1943 where, the story tells us, a group of seven year olds are happily playing.

Taking place inside and out, around, through and over the building, climbing the walls, hanging and swinging from the scaffolding and generally being everywhere at once, the players give the impression of a free, unfettered childhood left to roam in the Gloucester countryside without adult interference, a blissful carefree world—or is it as happy as it first seems?

Carefree childhood appears to be an idyllic dream, certainly in Dennis Potter's world.

From the far reaches of the park, a boy, Willie, approaches, meandering here and there in his own imaginative world and being, in his mind, a pilot until his plane crashes and he lies 'dead', the first indication that World War II will impinge on their lives. Peter (Gary Beadle) swings and jumps into view practicing for the parachutist he intends to become, and galloping into the scene come Raymond and John, still at the 'Cowboys and Indians' stage.

They behave as boys do, fighting, arguing, taunting each other and generally being a nuisance, and there is laughter from an audience who recognise something of their their younger selves. The most comical scenes are of 'best friends' Angela and Audrey playing 'Mummies and Daddies' with a compliant Donald, some of the dialogue obviously picked up from their parents, but the mood becomes more thoughtful as snippets of the children's home lives are revealed in their play and it is Donald who is the most troubled and who brings the story to its dramatic and tragic conclusion.

The children are played by adults, but as the play progressed I found myself wondering what they would be like when they grew up—an unconscious tribute to their skills as actors—and the West Country accents they keep throughout add to the credibility. The cast, all equally impressive, include Gary Beadle, Ryan Early, Leila Farzad, Richard Frame, Gregory Gudgeon, Daniel Rabin and Laura Rogers, with Andrew D Edwards (designer), Richard Howell (lighting) and Tom Meehan (sound), and the creative team also brings such realism to the play that I'm amazed we all sat trustingly in our places with sights and sounds giving the impression that that we were about to be consumed by fire.

In this their fiftieth anniversary year, the Chichester Festival Theatre is not only looking back over the years but also looking to the future and the next generation to follow. If the calibre of this faultless production is anything to go by, we can be sure that our theatrical future is not only in very safe hands but will provide plenty of innovation and surprises.

The play concludes with lines from a poem by A E Houseman's 1896 poem: "What are those blue remembered hills? I see it shining plain, the happy highways where I went and cannot come again!".

**Reviewer:** [Sheila Connor](#)