

# British Theatre Guide

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

## Hysteria

Terry Johnson

London Classic Theatre

Charter Theatre, Preston

5–6 April 2017

When the founding father of psychiatry is left holding a naked woman's underwear, then Freudian Slip takes on a whole new meaning.

Then again, Terry Johnson's brilliant 1993 play undresses its abundant comedy in mind-altering ways.

At first glimpse, it's an old-fashioned and very English farce, with disrobing of male and female characters, who emerge or disappear through doors with split-second timing; misinterpret each other's words or actions; and generally descend into anarchic chaos.

Except that on this occasion it all takes place in Sigmund Freud's Hampstead home and finds the ailing analyst reflecting on his life, works, and looming death. Enter a distressed young woman, threatening suicide, and determined to unburden herself.

Then there is his doctor, angry that Freud intends to assert opinions that could be seen as anti-semitic. (And how much more contemporary could that be?)

So by the time Spanish surrealist artist Salvador Dali also arrives, the scene already pretty well resembles one of his paintings!

With this potent mix of reality and fantasy, comedy and drama, lightness and much darker shades, *Hysteria* makes demands on its audience, not to mention the cast of four. While it proved too much for one or two of the former, it was well within the grasp of the accomplished latter.

Ged McKenna gives a sardonic delivery of Freud's character, in sharp contrast to John Dorney's outrageously-physical Dali. As Dr Yahuda, Moray Treadwell paces his routine somewhere between the two.

Musical theatre star Summer Strallen has the rhythm spot-on as Jessica, a woman who carries the burden of the story's darker passages.

These were four first-class actors in another highly-polished production from London Classic Theatre. The constraints of a busy UK tour may not stretch to repeating the original play's famous design-led ending, but, as *Hysteria* proves, sometimes you can have too much excitement.

**Reviewer:** [David Upton](#)