

British Theatre Guide

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Painting a Wall

David Lan
Finborough Theatre
(2009)

35 years is a long time and even more so in South Africa where the horrors of Apartheid are fast becoming a distant memory. What would have seemed burning political issues that could land a writer in jail then can appear to be merely quirky now.

David Lan's first play was courageous, written by a White man about Coloureds and the futility and frustrations of their lives in a repressive society.

This play takes a long time to get into gear and indeed, there are periods when one literally spends time watching pistachio coloured paint dry. The colour is significant, as all Government walls in Cape Town had to be painted white and therefore, even if by serendipity, the quartet employed to cover it are making a statement.

The pick of the actors, Howard Charles, plays the wittiest and most interesting, Willy. He is a natural outsider whose rebelliousness is only partly suppressed by society and his colleagues.

His pal and moral protector is the more mature, married Samson (Syrus Lowe). This is a man who understands the limitations imposed upon his people and makes the most of a bad job.

The other pair are less well developed. Peter Landi's Henry comes to work on the morning of his daughter's death and quietly grieves, before taking uncharacteristically drastic action. Finally there is Peter, the boy who is not even allowed to paint and utters only a dozen words throughout but is perhaps the most courageous of all.

On one level, little happens in an hour or a little over of playing time. However, the political and social subtext is powerful. It is a delight to realise that at times, moments of great significance have lost their power to shock because they are beyond our understanding today when South Africa has had Black Presidents for a decade and a half.

This revival by Titus Halder would benefit from greater urgency but ends with a really meaningful message about the value of every human being, and as such, is a welcome reminder that we must never again let inhuman regimes into power anywhere.

Reviewer: [Philip Fisher](#)