

# British Theatre Guide

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

## Raving

Simon Paisley Day

Hampstead Theatre

17 October–23 November 2013

We have literally been here dozens of times before. Three middle-class couples find themselves thrown together for a weekend, in this case in a comfortable, Jonathan Fensom-designed Welsh farm cottage.

Anyone observing the opening scenes of *Raving*, following the lifting of a pastoral picture postcard curtain, will immediately assume themselves to be watching a play by Sir Alan Ayckbourn.

Soon enough, though, this debut play by distinguished actor Simon Paisley Day turns into an extended, undemanding sex romp sitcom of the kind that fills TV screens on a regular basis.

Even many of the stars on view will be familiar to those who rarely leave their couches to venture into the world of live entertainment.

The first couple that we meet are the standard, impoverished hangers on, Briony and Keith played by Tamzin Outhwaite and Barnaby Kay. This pair of teachers seem as neurotic as their unseen toddler who has still not been weaned even though he is three. This is the source of umpteen jokes (or to be more accurate the same joke delivered umpteen times in slightly different ways) as the 2¼ hours develop.

They swiftly analyse their hosts' friends, particularly identifying Serena and Charles as more objectionable even than any of the others. Lo and behold, director Ed Hall's wife Issy van Randwick and Nicholas Rowe unexpectedly appear as this pair of upper-class twits.

By this stage, viewers will have a good idea of the level of humour that they will be able to enjoy when the group is completed by the meat in the sandwich, creepy Ross and appropriately rosy Rosy, an amazingly happy couple portrayed by Robert Webb and Sarah Hadland.

Their tale of a sacked au pair who alleged sexual misconduct but somehow brought them even closer together is drawn out and seems likely precursor to final scene fireworks that give each of the actors a few moments of glory.

Before that, the rich toffs patronise for England, causing considerable distress to the stressed out newish parents but giving another acting duo an opportunity to have some rather clichéd fun.

The behaviour of the whole sextet veers away from naturalism at a very early stage and seems far more design for delivery of jokes, though on opening night there were too many that missed their targets.

Strangely, the most believable character turned out to be a stray Tabby, the twits' sexed-up 17-year-old orphaned niece with a drug habit. The highly promising Bel Powley who made such a

good impression in [Jumpy](#) proves suitably sulky and sexy, speaking in a sub-Caribbean patois and exposing far more than one might expect.

The other visitor is Welsh farmer Mr Morgan, Ifan Huw Dafydd being asked to play Mr Angry in an extended scene that doesn't really add much to the drama but does patronise the disabled.

London is currently enjoying a number of plays that are effectively TV sitcoms expanded to several times their normal length in the hope that they will prove several times as funny.

On occasion, and to some viewers, this is likely to be the case. There has to be a considerable risk that many others will struggle to relate to comedy that relies on yet more sexual excess utilised as the main driver for a relatively costly evening at the theatre.

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