

British Theatre Guide

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Riflemind

Andrew Upton
Trafalgar Studios 1
(2008)

Riflemind, which marks the start of Trafalgar Studios' collaborations with the Sydney Theatre Company and New York's LAByrinth, seemingly has everything going for it. Its Australian writer is Andrew Upton, better known perhaps as Mr Cate Blanchett, while top American director and actor, Philip Seymour Hoffman, has been given a cast of great actors to work with.

However, this story of a rock band re-forming ten years on is a stinker. In the last couple of years, there have been a couple of brilliant plays about rockers, Adam Rapp's [Finer Noble Gases](#) and [the dYsFUnCKshOnalZ!](#) by Mike Packer, so it can be done. They both combined human interest drama and rich comedy with mind-blowing live music.

Riflemind misses out on all three of those elements as Upton shows us a bunch of has-beens attempting to outbore each other under the influence of malign substances. The six older characters might be trying to find a purpose in life but many people are and they can't afford to visit each other by helicopter.

The reunion takes place at the mansion of John Hannah's John, the band's miserable Scottish songwriter, and his meek wife, Lynn, a junkie waiting to happen, played by Susan Prior. The lavish kitchen/living room with massive sub-Rothko painting and symbolic warped photo, shows off Australian designer Richard Rogers to good effect.

They don't seem to want their visitors, the other band members plus a couple of gloomily sexed-up hangers-on, and we might all have been better off had they not been invited.

For 2½ hours, they mope around chasing sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll with no great enthusiasm, each periodically breaking off for their own five minutes of tedious ranting, perhaps to show us the hole at the centre of a superstar's life when they have left the limelight and returned to normality.

It seems that Andrew Upton's message is that money can't buy you love or happiness and he should know, one way or the other. In this case, your hard-earned £45 won't buy you a good night out either, despite the efforts of a dedicated team led by Hannah and Paul Hilton who, along with several others in an Anglo-Australian cast, is not helped by an accent that is hard to place.

The problem with *Riflemind* is not merely that it is one long wallow in collective middle-aged self pity but the schematic structuring which ensures that we get examples of bad behaviour lined up to make appearances and points for the sake of it. As a result, you never have the impression that these people are drawn from reality.

There is no doubt that Trafalgar Studios will import some wonderful work from their new partners and it is just a pity that they couldn't have started off with something a little more inspiring.

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Reviewer: [Philip Fisher](#)