

British Theatre Guide

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Rough Crossing

Tom Stoppard

Bill Kenwright presents

The Lyric, Theatre Royal Plymouth

18–23 March 2019

Disappointing, dull and derivative.

Tom Stoppard, he of the sublime *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, *Travesties*, *Arcadia* and the fabulous like, seems to have drifted into the doldrums with his reworking of Ferenc Molnár's *The Play at the Castle*. It's all very Noël Coward without the wit, farce without the frisson and frivolity without any real laughs.

Attempting to resuscitate the revival of Stoppard's 1984 offering is an illustrious line-up with the lovely John Partridge (*EastEnders*, *MasterChef* and seemingly regular visitor to Plymouth), desperately attempting to breathe life into the turgid script, hamming it up and beautifully camp as Turai, exhaustingly putting his cast through its paces in his convoluted soon-to-be-opening-in-New-York play.

For a moment, expectations are high: is Stoppard going to give us something clever and amusing, profound and absurd with a play-within-a-play? But that notion is quickly sunk without trace.

Turai's attempt to be ready for opening night is beset by a dire script, bonkers steward (the delightful Charlie Stemp, worthy winner of the 2018 Theatre World Award for Outstanding Broadway debut and soon to play Bert in *Mary Poppins*), lovelorn composer and pianist Adam (Rob Ostlere), his fiancée and leading lady luvvie (Issy Van Randwyck) who is seemingly rekindling passion in her leading man Ivor Fish (Simon Dutton). Meanwhile co-author Gal (*Game On*'s Matthew Cottle) taciturnly eats his way through the rough crossing as chaos prevails.

Running gags—cognac, Dvornichek's struggle against the flat calm sea and Two Ronnie-esque delayed answers—fail to buoy up a wasted, but mercifully short, evening although Colin Richmond's two-storey, art deco cruise liner set is a triumph.

Stoppard's close friend André Previn's commissioned songs are all very music hall and pedestrian but, in reality, it is the final few moments of a propos nothing jazz hands, high kicks and varying vocals (in a very small space) which is the most fun of the evening.

Such a shame. Best let it sink without trace.

Reviewer: [Karen Bussell](#)