

British Theatre Guide

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Sherlock Holmes: A Scandal in Bohemia

Arthur Conan Doyle, adapted by Jennifer Dick

Bard in the Botanics

Glasgow Botanical Gardens

17 July–2 August 2025

It's Sherlock Holmes, but not necessarily as we know him. In *A Scandal in Bohemia*, Bard in the Botanics has taken three short stories and fused them into one through using the conceit of one character to link them. Irene Adler, or “that woman”, from *A Scandal in Bohemia* makes her entrance before and departure thereafter with the *Scandal* in between.

Played with great presence by Rebecca Robin, this strong female character gives it an equally strong narrative arc. The hanging together of the three tales works because of the central relationship between John Watson, played by Stephen Arden, and Holmes himself, played by Adam Donaldson. It makes this a highly effective conceit.

Adler is able to outwit a Holmes who appears not as the self-assured, arrogant character we are used to but as a doubtful and at times rather lost member of the team. It reminded me of the type of interpretation that John Malkovich managed with Hercule Poirot in the *ABC Murders* rather than the aloofness we associate with Benedict Cumberbatch or if your classic Holmes is Basil Rathbone. This reimagining works especially well because we are in a Victorian timepiece in terms of the structure that is around us.

As a Scottish John Watson, Arden manages to give us an equally outraged, exasperated and friendly admirer of an establishing Holmes, played by Donaldson, not as this smug, pompous git but as somebody who has doubts. Often, it is that relationship between the two that drives the narrative, and here their work together allows each to inhabit the space between them distinctively but with enough of a relationship to feel like a genuine partnership should.

The hint at a romance is ultimately doomed because there is no space for a thruple.

James Boal provides us with a variety of additional characters including Lestrade with distinctiveness, which were all very impressive.

The set is minimalistic and suggests a long, lazy afternoon on a Sunday in the midst of the Botanic Gardens at one end whilst, the other holds functional value. Works well.

There is an interesting soundscape which is not intrusive and works fittingly—took me a little while to work out the songs, but got there before they faded.

Bard in the Botanics has, over the last few years, increased their offer to the locals in the West End from Shakespeare itself. They have used classics and adaptations, and it is interesting to note that this interpretation of Holmes adds to that. It is an interesting addition and one that is to be applauded, simply because Doyle manages to give us a narrative which, like Shakespeare, can be adapted, developed and added to. Rather than give us a retread which is a replica of what we see

in the television, they have struck out and given us a very entertaining evening—a marvellous night out.

Reviewer: [Donald C Stewart](#)