

British Theatre Guide

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

Spyski

Steven Canny and John Nicholson

Peepolykus

Lyric, Hammersmith

(2008)

It is rarely easy to describe a Peepolykus production. The company specialise in extremely funny comedies compiled from large doses of pastiche, slapstick, physical gags and pure inspiration.

The first three minutes of *Spyski* show the five highly talented actors presenting a slightly speeded up and exaggerated version of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. For those with long memories, Mark Ravenhill's *Handbag* did the same in the Lyric Studio a decade or more back. Where his play became a camp extravaganza, *Spyski* dissolves into a spoof of those earnest (sorry) British spy dramas that have been popular for at least half a century and arguably four or five times as long.

The not very swashbuckling hero is John Nicholson's John Nicholson, an actor who finds himself sharing a hospital room with a poisoned Russian spy.

With help from Nurse Miranda (Rhona Croker) he travels around the country trying to prevent MI5, represented by his fearsome wife, Sophie Russell (Sophie Russell) and their Russian counterparts from possessing a prime example of genetic engineering, a non-crying baby. The fear is that in the wrong hands, its DNA could create a compliant society.

The team that brought us [The Hound of the Baskervilles](#) with an even smaller cast hits many satirical targets in its attempt to sustain the laughter for two full hours under the sure direction of David Farr.

The imagination and comic creativity is exceptional, whether it is in plotting, physical gags or verbal humour, all gently poking fun at, amongst other targets, the James Bond/John le Carré genre, luvvies or stiff upper lip Brits.

There are some brilliant moments and each viewer will have their own favourites. The dangers of reading Time Out and a wonderful pastiche of Katie Mitchell staged films tickled this reviewer as much as any.

As always, Peepolykus' shows have to be seen to be believed but those that make it to West London will not be disappointed since, despite a few limp moments, the laughter quotient is as high as ever.

Ray Brown [reviewed](#) this production at the West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds, and Peter Lathan [reviewed](#) it at Northern Stage, Newcastle

Reviewer: [Philip Fisher](#)