

British Theatre Guide

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The Government Inspector

Nikolai Gogol, adapted by David Harrower

Birmingham Repertory Theatre in association with Ramps On The Moon

The Quarry, West Yorkshire Playhouse

20–30 April 2016

It is mid 19th century Russia in a small town, some days travel away from Petersburg. Here we have a corrupt administration headed by a corrupt mayor. The play opens as a rumour zips round town. A government inspector is about to arrive, incognito. In fact a delusional, deceitful, wastrel, stony broke and hungry, turns up at the local hotel. The cat is amongst the pigeons.

David Carlyle's energetic Mayor leads his crooked cronies in a frenetic attempt to clean up the town: clear the decaying sick from the hospital, scrub the street, make an excuse for the absence of a church supposed to have been built on state money some time ago. We see establishment (doctor, head teacher, post master, judge, landowners) arrive at fleetingly self-convincing justifications for criminal behaviour.

This is a timeless classic—we are reminded of our own national establishment. When the Mayor cries "remember, we're all in it together," the contemporary reference is noted and greeted by audience laughter.

Adaptor David Harrower has given *The Government Inspector* a first-class, rude, crude, rumbustious treatment and Roxana Silbert (director) and Ewan Marshall (associate director) have created a wiz-bang comedy that had the Leeds audience tittering and bellowing from the first few minutes to the end. Ti Green's design with balcony, speaking lift and revolving doors expands the stage and gives the cast of eighteen an intricate space in which, to quote Spike Milligan, to run, jump, and stand still. There's a lot of running and jumping!

So, an excellent play and an excellent production. But there is more. This is, as the programme says, "a ground-breaking touring project that signals a step change in disability arts provision in the UK and will reframe the way theatre by and for deaf and disabled people is made and seen." And so it does. A co-production from Birmingham Repertory Theatre and Ramps on the Moon—a consortium of theatres and theatre groups dedicated to diversity in theatre.

On stage, with roles, are signers and performers, some of whom have obvious... well, disabilities in this context seems a totally inappropriate term, so I will say particular characteristics. The consequence is theatrical and comedic dynamite. Without naming names, two or three of the "disabled" actors would have stolen the show, if the rest of the cast were not so good. It is a first class cast, bubbling with talent.

This production of *The Government Inspector* is a learning experience. It reveals signing as an expressive dramatic language with a wealth of comedic scope. We to see a wonderfully varied group of hugely talented actors showing us ourselves at our meanest and lowest. And how we

laugh. More than this, the show establishes the realisation that our theatrical casts have rarely fully represented the richly diverse society in which we live.

I doubt there has ever been a better production of Nikolai Vasilyevich Gogol-Yanovski's brilliant satire. And never a better satire on the old truth that power corrupts, absolute power absolutely. What would Gogol have made of our bunch with their parliamentary expenses and offshore banking?

Reviewer: [Ray Brown](#)