

British Theatre Guide

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Young Woodley

John Van Druten

Finborough

(2006)

John Van Druten's play was banned by the Censor in England and was first performed in New York in 1925. Three years later it was staged for one night by The Stage Society, a Sunday night club. Critics and audiences could not understand why the play had been banned. The production transferred to the Arts Theatre Club where the censor saw it and he, too, wondered why he had banned it. The ban was revoked and the production transferred to the Savoy Theatre where it had a very successful run. Adam Penford's revival at Finborough is the first since then.

Woodley, a 17-year-old house prefect, a sensitive and reticent lad, who writes poetry, finds sex beastly and an awful mix up". He falls in love with the housemaster's unhappily married young wife. The housemaster, who thinks writing poetry is unhealthy, catches them kissing. His wife threatens to leave him if he gets the boy expelled, saying she was to blame. The badly constructed third act then gets very melodramatic with the boy going berserk, having horrible sex with a local girl, and attempting to stab an obnoxious prefect.

Robin Chalk is excellent as Woodley. Joanna Croll gives a sensitive account of the housemaster's wife and Andrew Macbean manages to tone down the over-written role of the housemaster. Van Druten always thought that he had been more successful writing about the boys than he had been writing about the grown-ups. The young actors Christopher Fletcher, James Bye, Richard Crawley, James Joyce - are all very convincing as public school boys in the late nineteen-twenties and they can take encouragement from the fact that the actors who played the boys originally in 1928 - Frank Lawton, Jack Hawkins, Derrick de Marney and Henry Mollison - all went on to have successful careers in the theatre.

Reviewer: [Robert Tanitch](#)