

THEATRE PREVIEW

The Bedsit

Remember Bert Lynch in *Z Cars*? Since the 60s, Belfast-born actor James Ellis's reputation has grown to formidable heights, built against a backdrop of regular TV and West End theatre work, plus critically acclaimed performances for the National, the RSC and the Old Vic.

As soon as he read the powerfully disturbing *The Bedsit*, Ellis backed it to the hilt. His faith has been rewarded by critics' plaudits on his 'fierce and clever performance' in the 'highly charged political play'.

After a ten day rehearsal period, the play was up and running at The Tabard in Chiswick, with Ellis landing the dream job of headlining in his own local pub. It then played Battersea Arts Centre this June as part of the 'Time Out Critics Choice' season, where Observer Assembly liked it so much they've taken the production lock, stock and barrel to Edinburgh.

Revolving around the relationship between a lodger, a landlord and a menacing mystery man, it is a stark piece with, as writer Paul Sellar says, 'an air of threat'. Brady the landlord is played by Ellis; Dempster the lodger by Gerard Rooney, familiar from the 'I'm not bitter' Murphy's ads. James Hartman is Anton, the man Sellar describes as having 'an aura' about him. 'He's calm and polite but more menacing for it. A lot of people have put two and two together and billed them as IRA or a terrorist organisation. It does have a political backdrop, and there's a topical resonance for sure, but it's not really about that. It could be happening at any time in any place where these sorts of power struggles go on.'

Keeping close to the actors during the play's development has been invaluable for Sellar, who has



Lynch mob: *The Bedsit*

since been commissioned by the National Theatre. Not only can he pick up on problems and help deepen aspects of the script, but sometimes, as he says, 'someone might do something unexpected accidentally, but it works best.' The best example of that would give away the plot twist which results in the play's shocking climax. And all before lunch too. (Gabe Stewart)

■ For details, see Hit list, right.