

What's On

Epping Forest

Theatre Museum

8-15 September 1993

It's A Mad, Mad World

The Theatre Museum on the edge of Covent Garden is a celebration of all things theatrical – even the toilet tiles show scenes from Shakespeare's histories.

And Paul Sellar's new play fits in very well in this environment, possessing everything a new play needs – humour, intelligence, poetic prose, a serious message and only one act. And it's ever so slightly rough around the edges, giving one a wonderful sense of potential for his next works. He's definitely someone to watch out for.

Thanks to private sponsorship and Westminster Arts funding, Trespass Theatre Company – a group of young drama graduates who clearly know their stuff – questions the distinction between madness and reason within the confines of a surreal "nuthouse". Sellar plays with ideas beautifully in this profound piece, conjuring up many a pretty phrase and showing all the humour and terror of madness, often in the same breath.

Our host for the evening is the Doctor (Stephen Gilroy) who introduces us to his patients, five obviously intelligent people whose reactions to horrific events in their lives have provoked the only sane response possible – going mad. "They haven't communicated with each other for the three days," he says, pushing his glasses neatly up his nose and looking not unlike Ronnie Corbett; "but their minds run riot..."

And so they do. "Diseased mind" Mandy Love (Anna Murphy) stands at the back, singing silently; "Shell shocked" Peter Corry (Martin Hearn) blurts out mixed metaphors and plays childish power games with his cell mates; "time traveller" Douglas Whittle (Mungo Dennison) is entertainingly eccentric; and "morbid recluse" Lucy Thirst (Harriet Scott) is convincingly desperate as she gabbles mathematical facts which she first heard as a child while witnessing a man get beaten to death. Liz Cox's ghost of a murdered wife who returns to haunt her husband is measured and menacing, though the star of the show is definitely Nicholas Fletcher as Robert: his comic timing is spot-on, each word spat out haltingly and his uncertainty with the world and himself visible at every moment.

The six strong production team has done a splendid job, and with slick and professional direction from Michael Friend and Andy Johnson this is a thoroughly enjoyable new play. And at only one hour long, it means you can walk out at 8.30 into a jumping Covent Garden. The mad thing is that people will go to Leicester Square and spend as much money to see Sylvester Stallone. That's what we call sane.

Melissa Michaels