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Home » Reviews » Drama » A Doll's House, Secret location in London – Review



Credit: Chelsea Theatre and Theatre of Europe

A Doll's House, Secret location in London - Review

Author: Corrie Tan in Drama, Off West End, Reviews 9 November 2016 0 Comments 59 Views

Pros: Henrik Ibsen's 19th-century play is adapted with bracing intimacy, staged in actual homes across London in a thoroughly immersive experience.

Cons: Some lingering questions as to the ethics behind the participatory aspect of this production.

Summary

Rating

A confronting, challenging and compelling adaptation that engages with love and domesticity to evoke a keen sense of discomfort.

Excellent

User Rating: Be the first one !

The evening begins with an act of complicity. We, a group of about twenty strangers, are about to be invited into the heart of domesticity; the closed doors behind which the rough edges of relationships are either smoothed over or flayed to the bone.

The performers-facilitators Cassie Raine, Ben Samuels and Jamie Zubairi lead us upstairs and into the cosy apartment of our hosts, a newly-married couple whose living room is filled with dozens of congratulatory cards on their recent wedding – and a confused cat. Part immersive theatre experience, part social experiment, the show – co-presented by Chelsea Theatre and Theatre of Europe – often feels like observing an illicit dinner party, or peeking at your neighbours through a crack in the wall.

I can't give away too much about what unspools over the course of the evening, but what follows succeeds largely because the audience is in the dark about what turn the performance will take. Ibsen's seminal work about a married couple facing an impossible situation now depends on the unique (and as yet unknown) personal histories of real-life, non-performer participants led by Raine, Samuels and Zubairi, who also play certain characters.



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The story of Torvald and Nora, first performed in 1879, is an excruciating look at the restrictive marriage norms of the 19th century. While it is very much a political play in its pointed look at female agency in a patriarchal society, this production takes a different tack in choosing to focus on the emotional landscape of a couple's journey. The microscope zooms in on the granular details of a marriage: Is hiding a stash of chocolates from your spouse considered lying? Then the questions get bigger. What are their hopes for the future? How do they make decisions and sacrifices? What secrets do they keep, large or small? What does betrayal really mean?

Every night, Raine, Samuels and Zubairi must react to a new set of hosts and audience members that will alter the DNA of the show. They do this with daring but also with a gentle touch, careful to walk that thin line between vulnerability and over-exposure. And anyone who's tried to put together a disintegrating relationship will find themselves grimacing at the difficult questions but also savouring some truly tender moments of love and affection.

We often identify with characters in naturalistic plays because of how authentic their emotional arcs are and how real they feel. Here, the emotions are, in fact, real and raw. The lines quickly blur between character and participant, so much so that we don't just see performers trying to figure out love – we see ourselves.

Author: After the play by Henrik Ibsen, concept and direction by Fix&Foxy (Denmark)

Director: Pelle Nordhøj Kann (for the UK run)

Producer: Henriette Morrison

Booking Until: 10 December 2016

Box Office: 020 7352 1967

Booking Link: <http://www.chelseatheatre.org.uk/project/a-dolls-house/>

Last name *

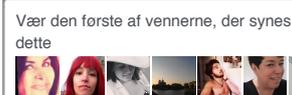
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ABOUT CORRIE TAN



Corrie is a recovering arts journalist from Singapore. She collects languages, theatre programmes, and stories that need to be told.



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