

the spot

DUND-UP

pulled into his conspiracy theory rather than observing from afar.

Add to that a first half that's a little slow at times, and a second half that never quite mines the text for its black humour (the exception being Jeff Still's mischievous cameo as a priapic, free-basing psychiatrist), and you're left with an evening of qualified pleasures.

James Saunders's *Bodies* is part of the Richmond Orange Tree's 25th anniversary season, which involves restaging triumphs from the past. Indeed, it even boasts an irrepressible Dinsdale Landen, repeating his acclaimed performance as the sottish headmaster pressing the necessity of neurosis to his psychologically shrink-wrapped dinner guests.

Plays don't come much more wordy than this – nor more symmetrical, with its two middle-class couples who once briefly swapped partners. Couple A (if

you forgive the mathematical label) have since gone to America and had "The Therapy", which has taught them to live in the moment and "cured" them of neurosis. Couple B (including Landen) have stayed in Britain and blundered on. When they meet again, after nine years, sparks are set to fly.

Except they don't. Instead, they embark on an abstruse argument about art and the nature of a life well-lived ("a healthy person lives in a sate of benevolent egoism" and so on). Fascinating but quite undramatic – Pinter's *Betrayal* without the pain, Doug Lucie without the savage humour.

Still, the acting is so good that you hardly notice – in particular Landen's performance. He may look a little out of place agewise (at times you wonder whether his differences with the others are so much philosophical as generational), but he imbues Saunders's painting-by-numbers headmaster character with a desperate energy that he probably doesn't deserve.

■ *'Bug'* is at *The Gate*, London W11 to 19 Oct. Booking: 0171-229 5387. *'Bodies'* is at the *Orange Tree*, Richmond to 5 Oct. Booking: 0181-940 3633

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