

**Air of fustiness: Dinsdale Landen and Liz Crowther in Bodies**

**A**MONG London theatres, the Orange Tree is unusually loyal to the writers and actors who have passed across its stage. It seems natural, therefore, that this opening production in the theatre's 25th anniversary season should be the play James Saunders wrote for the fledgling company in 1977, and should feature a cast of familiar Richmond faces. Natural, if not wholly advisable. The virtues of Saunders's play are sometimes eclipsed by the air of fustiness that wafts through it.

Bodies is a sturdy example of the Seventies' dinner-party play, where the civilised veneer of suburban conversation hides a mass of seething anxieties and antagonisms. Anne and her weak, philandering teacher husband Mervyn were once great friends with Helen and her businessman husband David, until both swapped partners for a while, then subsequently lost touch. Now David and Helen have been rejuvenated by an unspecified brand of therapy that roots the self firmly in the body, while Mervyn is depressed that one of his students, a devotee of the same therapy, has attempted suicide. The title therefore refers to bodies on several levels: sexual, metaphysical and corporal.

Saunders's script is rather rickety. It begins with monologues that shift slowly into dialogue, about the

## Sex and therapy in a time capsule

**Bodies**  
*The Orange Tree,*  
*Richmond*

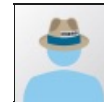
**NICK CURTIS**

motivations of infidelity. Then, in the second half, it becomes a dense argument about different philosophies of living. The dialogue is taut, but it's hard to get over the unevenness of the plotting, or the fact that attitudes to guru therapies have changed, or the fact that the women, though strongly characterised, are defined only in relation to their husbands.

Sam Walters's production is well paced, with good work from Carole Nimmons and Liz Crowther as Anne and Helen, and a fine, free-wheeling performance from Dinsdale Landen as Mervyn. But the feeling remains that this piece has been revived for the wrong reasons, in spite of its failings rather than because it possesses enduring virtues.

● *Until 5 October. Box office: 0181 940 3633.*

## Bodies Nick Curtis Standard



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Sun, Nov 7, 2021