

It's Sunday morning, a shade early for all concerned and Anthony Page is plying me with coffee and playing the perfect host in his comfortable, rambling Notting Hill flat, but feeling a little befuddled. "We had a bit of a celebration last night," he confides apologetically. Small wonder. Reviews for his production of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* starring Janet McTeer and Owen Teale have verged on the rhapsodic. Hardened critics have been ransacking *Roger's Thesaurus* for superlatives. Page, however, isn't content to sit back on his laurels. "With Ibsen in the West End, unless they're good, we won't remain there very long," he remarks carefully. Evidence of a streak of practicality in someone whose genial, urbane manner suggests a home at the sophisticated end of the world.

His tall, imposing figure, expansive rather than overbearing, is evidence of his family's military background in India, and indeed he was in Delhi when a fax arrived from producer Thelma Holt inviting him to direct *A Doll's House*. "I'd only ever done Ibsen once, years ago. I'd admired Janet, so I said yes."

Aside from the bravery of the performances he has coaxied from his cast, the flow of Frank McGuinness's translation – "Ibsen made a great point that the translations should sound as if they were overheard in a drawing-room," says Page – much of his success is down to the element of suspense that charges up the production. Reviewing his 1979 re-make of Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes*, Pauline Kael commented that "Page doesn't seem to have an instinct for the thriller form". If that's the case, he's learnt a trick or two.

Ibsen's thriller-like plotting has been underlined by beefing up Nora's potential fate. The plot centres around a secretly negotiated loan on which she has forged a signature. "In the later version he cut a lot of references to forgery – Krogstad telling her, 'Your whole future could be at stake' – which leaves the issue a little understated. I always felt it was quite peculiar that Nora gets suicidal quite so quickly, so we put back a few lines from the original draft to make it stronger."

Independent on Doll's House & Page



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