

REVIEWS

Out Cry — Northcott Theatre, Exeter, until Saturday



Jason Merrells as Felice and Sara Stewart as Clare in Out Cry Photo: John Haynes

To play with fear ...

GETTING to grips with Out Cry is a bit like looking at a "magic eye" picture.

The secret is to relax your eyes until they are barely focusing and look beyond the initial pattern until the hidden image becomes clear.

Out Cry's surface form is more than a little blurred.

The two-character play tells the tale of an actor and actress who are abandoned by their theatre company and left facing an expectant audience.

It is a performance about a man and a woman isolated in a strange town and also the story of a brother and sister orphaned in violent circumstances.

But the real picture of Out Cry lies beneath these plots — its themes being fear, obsessive love, isolation and panic.

The audience is smothered in the relationship between Clare and Felice and their struggle to come to terms with both present and past situations.

As the tales unravel we become part of the drama — an audience watching a couple who, in turn, are observing their audience.

The distinction between the two becomes increasingly smudged and we are left sharing Felice and Clare's emotions.

We feel abandoned when they perform for each other and ignore us and claustrophobic by their refusal to release us from their dark and chilling world.

Ever-present throughout the plot are Tennessee William's recurring themes of madness and suppressed sexuality. But the threads running through

the play all stem back to a line spoken by Felice within minutes of the play opening: "To play with fear is to play with fire."

Jason Merrells and Sara Stewart are superb in their portrayal of the highly passionate Felice and Clare.

They connect, with searing energy, both with each other and the audience.

Cheek By Jowl were described by Time Magazine as "One of the ten great theatre companies in the world."

With this British premiere of Out Cry, it looks as though they are set to retain the accolade.

Tennessee Williams himself described the play as his "most beautiful play since Streetcar."

The beauty lies in its haunting obsession.

DEBBIE SPERRY

Herald Express Out Cry



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