

# Like mother, like daughter

THEATRE *Amy's View* RNT, SBC, London

David Hare is no big fan of arts journalists, critics, and cultural arbiters: he once wrote in a *Spectator* diary column that you had to hate art to work for *The Independent*. So one of the gifts for which he has been rightly lauded in his later plays – the ability to see things from the other person's perspective – was always likely to be put to a severe test when it came to creating a critic-figure about whom the audience could be validly in two minds.

Moving in jumps from 1979 to 1995, Hare's new play, *Amy's View*, looks at how the close relationship between Esme, a winningly actressy old West End pro (Judi Dench, never better) and Amy, her publisher daughter (Samantha Bond) undergoes mounting strain after the daughter throws in her lot with Dominic (Eoin McCarthy) a young film critic and wannabe director. Esme doubts from the start that he can make her daughter happy and tries to drive the pair apart by betraying Amy's secret that she is pregnant, a fact unlikely to go down well with Dominic whose work axiomatically has to come first.

As it turns out, Esme's hunch proves accurate. By 1985, Dominic has become the repellantly arrogant, power-mad mastermind of a high-rating TV arts programme that exalts in trashing creative effort on the pious pretext of cutting through elitist hype and sticking up for the ordinary "consumer". A grudge is passed off as public spiritedness. With a galumphing lack of tact, given the downward spiral of Esme's fortunes as the West End declines and parts for older women dry up, Dominic also performs the fashionably ritual dance on the supposed grave of theatre.

A third act, set in 1993, brings the revelations – brilliantly paced both in the writing and in Richard Eyre's moving, funny, richly rewarding production –

that Esme is now a casualty of the Lloyds insurance disaster, with no end to the money she owes, and that, ironically, in the light of her previous scorn for television and its Dominic-shaped values, she is reduced to playing a nurse in a medical soap. Her position oddly echoes that of her daughter. If Amy cannot bring herself to leave an adulterous husband, Esme refuses to sue or boot out her live-in companion (Ronald Pickup) the man who, as her financial adviser, is the author of her woes. So what right has either woman to criticise the other's arrangements? It is this that sparks off their climactic ding-dong.

Amy's view is that you have to give love unconditionally and that one day it will be rewarded. "You never see the man I love," she complains to her mother. Offered insufficient glimpses of a Dominic who might have turned out better, an audience could answer: neither do we. The excellent, bleakly ambivalent final act, set in 1995, after Amy's premature death, leaves you wondering for a while, however, if her love will bear posthumous fruit.

In the stark dressing room where she is preparing to go on in a surprise hit, a withdrawn, sobered Esme, who has lost everything but her work, receives an unexpected visit from Dominic. Having betrayed Amy, is it legitimate for him to want to make something positive from her death by establishing the friendly relations with Esme she had always longed for? To hate him, he says, would be a waste of Esme's life. If the final, magically theatrical sequence suggests that Esme's life will never embrace Dominic, there's also a hint, for the first time, that Amy's view is not entirely cock-eyed.

Booking: 0171-928 2252

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