



Fine ensemble: Valerie Lilley, Mary Macleod and Jason Watkins in *Blue Heart*

The art of talking nonsense

SELDOM has theatrical experimentation seemed so playful or enjoyable. This brace of new plays from Caryl Churchill, accessibly directed by Max Stafford-Clark for *Out of Joint* and coming soon to the Royal Court, toys with traditional notions of narrative and dialogue. Such explorations are usually arid, navel-gazing affairs, but in *Blue Heart* Churchill has the wisdom to be witty. Although her dramatic innovations do little more than prove an intellectual point, they are fun to watch.

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Blue Heart ★
Traverse Theatre,
Edinburgh

NICK CURTIS

In the first play, *Heart's Desire*, the same scene featuring two bickering, sitcom-style parents waiting for a daughter recently returned from Australia is halted and replayed with bizarre alterations. The arguments between Valerie Lilley and Bernard Gallagher vary in intensity and content. In one version they speak only the beginnings of their lines, in another just the ends. A couple of times, the daughter actually arrives, but on other occasions the visitors turn out to be a gang of rampaging children, an ostrich, a Nazi demanding papers, and a pair of SAS men who gun down everybody in the living room. The acting is arch, as befits a play which suggests the multirarious directions a story may take and the ease with which theatrical normality can be turned on its head.

The second play, *Blue Kettle*, is more sophisticated

although arguably no more profound. Derek (Jason Watkins) presents himself to five women as the son they gave up for adoption, a weird hobby which soon mutates into a cynical con and a sadistic psychological game. Throughout, Churchill introduces the words "blue" and "kettle" in place of expected words, stepping up the frequency until, towards the end, lines like "bl bl ket b b b excuse!" are common. Thus she demonstrates that the emotional consistency of

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a story need not be affected by dialogue which becomes steadily nonsensical. Thanks to Stafford-Clark's fine, wry ensemble, we are coaxed away from our complacent expectations with good humour. I doubt that Churchill wrote these plays for any other reason than to prove that she *could*. Well, she's proved that, and even if her experiment is just an intellectual one, she has also proved that testing theatrical conventions can be a pleasure for audiences, and not just an indulgence of performers.

● *Traverse Theatre box office:*
0131 228 1404. *Royal Court:*
0171 565 5000.

Blue Heart Curtis Standard



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ianlharris

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