



Rupert Everett, left, and David Foxe blur the edges between genders

Picture: ALASTAIR MURRI

Everett drags up an appealing performance

RUPERT EVERETT played a lady last night and won. Croisique he may have been, but rivetingly stamped with the ring of emotional truth too. You soon forget the real-headed shock of him — a hefty, bawling figure in his black and fuchsia evening-suit, with a haughty face so make-up that you wanted to accuse it of lying: oh, those prim, pursed lip-sticked lips, a deluge of eye-shadow, ivory cheeks and black eye-brows. He looked a little like a snowed-out Joyce Grenold, dressed up for a very fancy dress party, and a lot like a sulky drag-queen whose face is her misfortune.

His walk, a scurrying waddle, was reminiscent of a penguin in trouble. It was on the painted face of it, the greatest of risks for Everett. After his acclaim in Hollywood and America for *My Best Friend's Wedding*, which critics, after would have dared as much. He even dresses and they Flora Godrich, one of Tennessee Williams's primary despises their grand dames, following after Tallulah Bankhead and Elizabeth Taylor must have taken real spirit.

Daily blurring a face in both actual camps and blurring the difference between genders, Everett gives this anti-burlesque an interesting new aspect. His Flora may sometimes seem bitch, but there are understated flashes of femininity and a delicate style of speaking too. He comes across as a sort of lady of the house. His Mrs Godrich is both interestingly underplayed and a gender-bending queen whose symptoms and behavior seem Adorno-like. Flora is also Williams's own alter ego. The Milk Train doesn't stop here. Any more is one of Williams's close encounters between a rich, aging woman and a young man whom she hopes will get her wracked life in rights with a healing touch of sex. We have been here before. But *The Milk Train* takes a turn for the different — as an obvious dance of death allegory. Mrs Godrich does indeed live up to

FIRST NIGHT
by Nicholas de Jongh

The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore
Lynne Hammersmith *

her name, while the young man, Chris (short for Christian and Christ) proves to be an angel of death who visits rich, old women to help prepare them to die.

The director, Philip Prowse, who always does his own spectacular designs, responds to the play's bizarre notions. Surely he treats it as a ritual ceremony, sets it in some-bode limbo-land. Prowse's uncharacteristically plain design, conjures up a white, icy void. James & Mitchell, who play the angel of death, never escape the menace of that silent, initial in his name, remaining oddly cool and unimpressed.

EVERETT, however, helps non-entertain the play's weakness — that Julia real femininity or spiritual business is dispatched by Flora and Chris. Once David Foxe, as Flora's currently maligned friend, the witch of Capri, has departed, Everett's grand dame reshapes into spasm of hysteria. A surgical grove explains the frenzy, a wheel chair becomes her seat and Flora visits to the right.

It's a most uncomfortable play to watch, with Everett's agonising central performance — all the raw, wracked emotions revealed — in which the gender boundaries are breached.

Ratings: O — Adequate
* good
** very good
*** outstanding
* poor

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