

# Humour with a dark heart pulls off a coup



Comic brio: Andrew Clover as the malevolent Robbie and Kate Ashfield as Lulu

**W**ITHIN moments of the start of Mark Ravenhill's disturbing new play I averted my eyes — to be spared the sight of a little light and simulated vomiting. But this proved just the first and mildest of the fierce shock-waves that beat down upon the Theatre Upstairs last night, leaving me at close of play shocked and shored-up with disquieted feelings. Certainly Shopping And P\*\*\*\*\* (or S&P as decency might name it) is sensationally titled, and includes two graphic homosexual incidents which may disgust those lacking very broad minds. It still strikes me, however, as both moral and serious.

S&P is a blackly humorous play for today's twentysomethings. It catches the despairing spirit and substance of life as druggily experienced by rootless young low-lifers in major English cities and



**FIRST NIGHT**  
by  
**Nicholas de Jongh**

**Shopping And P\*\*\*\*\***  
Royal Court, Theatre Upstairs  
Rating: ★

London itself. In Ravenhill's dramatic reportage this sub-world of drifters and dancers, of swallows of Ecstasy sold in dance halls, takers of cocaine and heroin, and eaters of nothing more than microwave meals seems an omen of the new century. They are the future and they do not work.

The scene, despite Julian McGowan's blandly anonymous set, is supposed to be an almost bare flat occupied by

three jobless young people of no fixed intentions and uncertain education. There are two narrative lines, which seem designed to drive the trio apart but finally bring them together. The first involves an escape attempt by Mark, whose chronic addiction to drugs and sex leaves him wide open to abuse; the second depends upon the desperate attempt by Lulu, an aspiring actress, to help Robbie, Mark's discarded lover, earn the £3,000 sacrificed by giving 300 Ecstasy tablets away to the first good-looking inquirers.

The money-making scam, which involves sex-lines and a memorable Robin Soons as a seedy entrepreneur is conducted with sharp comic brio in Max Stafford-Clark's wittily projected production. But it's Mark's dalliance with Gary, a rent boy whom he finally brings home, which leads to the play's heart of darkness.

For Gary — powerfully played by Antony Ryding — is a life casualty placed on the danger list. He, as do the older trio, believes sex is a matter of ownership. Used and abused for years he has been left with a self-destructive sexual urge. And in one of the most shocking scenes I have ever witnessed Mark and Robbie, while Lulu watches over them, look set to indulge their love of fantasy with catastrophic results for Gary.

**T**HIS scene of alarming sexual menace is, however, convincingly motivated. It forms part of Ravenhill's indictment of a new generation, for whom history is dead, schooled to believe materialism matters most, to treat sex as an anonymous commodity, and with the technological support of computers, videos and phone lines flourish in impersonal comfort.

Stafford-Clark's eloquent production, with oscillating moods of danger and insouciance, inspires performances of emotional power and persuasiveness from James Kennedy's bleakly despairing Mark, Kate Ashfield's bitter-sweet Lulu and Andrew Clover's malevolent Robbie. A real coup de theatre.

**Ratings:** No stars — adequate  
★ good, ★★ very good  
★★★ outstanding, X poor  
**More reviews Page 48**

## Notting Hill says 'move the carnival'

IT MAY BE the biggest street party in the world but the Notting Hill Carnival is driving many people who live there to distraction.

Carnival organisers are coming under intense pressure from residents to increase the geographical area covered by the annual two-day event, as the only way of coping with the million-plus revellers it attracts.

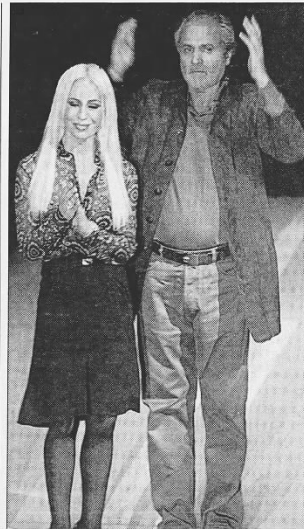
Notting Hill Carnival Ltd chairman Claire Holder told the Evening Standard discussions were under way with police and Kensington and Chelsea council to expand the route.

She said: "This year we saw an explosion in the numbers coming to carnival and expansion has to come soon, if only on the grounds of public safety. But as yet we have no specific plans." Her

by **PATRICK SAWER**

carnival route, said: "I've had enough. I can't even move outside my own house because of the sound systems."

Doris Besant, chairman of Kensington's Tenants Management Organisation, said:



## Versace fashion to Di for

from **MIMI SPENCER** in Milan

**BRITISH** style is hot and the message has dawned on Donatella Versace, sister of Gianni, the flashy Italian fashion designer.

She showed her *Istante line* — the second, younger range by the House — to a packed audience in Milan last night and dedicated the entire performance to *Lady Diana* (sic).

London images from the Seventies heralded the English girls: Stella Tennant in a lemon-prim tea dress, Naomi Campbell in a frill-edged baby doll slip, Kate Moss in cute acid-pink ruffles. In fact, the show was all lavender, pink and yellow like a plate of fondant fancies at a WI meeting.

Hot pants, tiny tops and big pants are the message. But they may not be what Diana has in mind for her next summer wardrobe.

## Shopping de Jongh Standard



Clipped By:  
**ianlharris**  
Sun, Feb 12, 2023