

When a Frenchwoman that she's "stranger than bonkers" it feels like a pretty fair summation of Robert Holman's play. *Bad Weather* is an odd, enigmatic but strangely hypnotic work that shoots off from its social-realist setting to explore all sorts of weird byways of affection. The characters float through Steven Pimlott's muted production as if drugged or dreaming, with their inner thoughts hung out on display. It's hard to comprehend what's going on, harder still not to care.

The aforementioned yob Luke (Paul Popplewell), has inflicted GBH on a policeman, then let his relatively innocent friend Jamie (Ryan Pope) take the fall and go to prison. Jamie's mum Kay (Susan Brown) is torn apart, realising she always loved the psychotic Luke more than her own son. Jamie's pregnant girlfriend, Luke's teenage sister Rhona (Emma Handy), moves in with her. So does Noel (Barry Stanton), a married, emotionally needy juror who sympathised with Jamie's case. In a bid to help Kay

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and Jamie, this duo summon Agnes (Susan Engel) who was Kay's nanny when she was growing up as — wait for it — an heiress to a French vineyard, which only causes further problems of misplaced affection.

As the action switches between the council-estate squalor of Teesside and the sunny tranquility of the Champagne region, Holman depicts a world without

Luke? Why does Agnes take the family's problems on her shoulders, and why does she fall for Luke despite a 40-year age gap? Holman keeps us urgently guessing. The great strength of his script is the sympathy he generates for these characters. None of them, save Engel's serene and sexy Agnes, is particularly likeable, yet he makes us feel the charisma of Popplewell's Luke, the charm of Handy's abrasively lippy Rhona.

This is a sustained tease of a play, spun tauntingly out to three hours by characters repeatedly asking each other for "a few more min-



Alastair Muir

Inner thoughts hung out to dry: Paul Popplewell and Susan Engel

utes" of their scenes. The unseasonal weather that rains, snows and hails down on Ashley Martin-Davis's stark sets is a metaphor for the unusual and often unwise associations the characters make. The languid atmosphere of Pimlott's production emphasises that love,

whether filial or sexual, is a random thing beyond the explanations of logic. Or, come to that, of an RSC playwright. Like love, *Bad Weather* is a strange, fascinating and unsolvable mystery.

● In rep: box-office 01789 295623.

The Euro siren who screams blue murder

APART from the ability to scream blue murder in even more European languages than Ulrika Jonsson, a performance by Diamanda Galas brings out an audience who like their cults on the grim side of dark. It's true that Galas exerts a hypnotic allure for voyeurs as she

Diamanda Galas ○
Royal Festival Hall

MAX BELL

were obviously made of sterner stuff than the wags who told me to do an Odysseus, and bring ear-

board, piano and microphone), which enable her to perform on the fringes of studious insanity.

She began with Phil Ochs's *Iron Lady* (a metaphor for the electric chair), and then got really gloomy as she took on Baudelaire, Willie Dixon and Motown, reducing all to rubble. Her shrieking like an operatic banshee is part of the cathar-

applied to Paolo Pasolini's painful *Supplica a Mia Madre*.

Galas also does the blues; or should one call them the reds? Her deconstruction of Son House's *Death Letter*, with its treated and phased piano vibrato, was like taking a terminal trip to the last chance saloon and finding the bartender hanging off the rafters. Not

Curtis Standard Weather



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