

Don't broadcast it

STEPHEN Poliakoff's new play may capture the airs and disgraces, the official pomp and parochial complacencies of the 1930s BBC. But while *Talk of the City* revels in the atmosphere and manners of the wireless's heyday, his dramatic lines of action and argument falter and fade, lacking the weight of fully developed conflict. Poliakoff, who also ponderously directs, lacks a clear path through the text's excessive overgrowth.

Unusually for Poliakoff, *Talk of the City* involves an exploration of a little English cultural history. He considers the BBC's low dishonest

Talk of the City ○
Swan, Stratford

NICHOLAS DE JONGH

scenes and nearly three hours, Poliakoff squanders theatrical time dealing with Clive, the suave producer, and his frustrated attempts to win the active co-operation of Robbie, a bisexual farm labourer's son who comperes the *Friday Night at Eight* revue programme. "I could have realised ... just that bit quicker," Robbie finally laments when he has

missed the political chance and his fame is waning.

But Robbie's failure, which involves his two-timing female producer and a gay fling with a Jewish refugee, is not intrinsically interesting. His failure of perception just rates as sad. It's as though Poliakoff has edged out the real, interesting theatrical debate: could BBC radio have played a decisive role, making listeners uncomfortably concerned about the ghastly plight of German Jews? But in the play's one slightly dramatic scene, John Normington's Arnos Grove, the bow-tied head of *Talks*, simply peddles the man-



Alister Muir

Vamping singer: Sian Reeves in *Talk of the City*

darin line of cautious neutrality.

Angus Wright's Clive maintains a classy air of patrician urgency if not quite enough passion. But he cannot animate a play engrossed by Corporation manners — the scantily dressed dancers and singers to 1930s music, the stately newsread-

ers, Sian Reeves's vamping singer and David Westhead's Robbie, the strangely passionless radio comperere. Meanwhile, Britain's ostrich-like isolationism is never searchingly considered.

● *In repertoire. Box office: 01789 295623.*

de Jongh Standard Talk



Clipped By:

ianlharris

Tue, Jul 25, 2023