

## THEATRE

Copenhagen

As You Like It

Sweet Charity

by Kate Kellaway

# Lab dancing

Science and humanity never part company in **Copenhagen**, Michael Frayn's galvanising new play (National Theatre, Cottesloe). At first, the notion of a drama built around the question of what took place between two physicists, Werner Heisenberg and Niels Bohr, when they met in Nazi-occupied Copenhagen in 1941 seems like an academic dead end, something that could not be interesting for more than two hours.

But Frayn (who shows among other things the debased status of 'interesting' as an adjective) earns our absolute attention. Bohr, father of quantum physics, once said: 'Never express yourself more clearly than you can think.'

This is a play about uncer-

tainty - it puts Tom Stoppard's play about quantum physics, *Happgood*, in the shade. The latter was intellectually ostentatious but dead on the stage. This is intellectually adventurous, an experiment with time. Heisenberg formulated the uncertainty principle, which states that the more accurately a particle's position can be determined, the less is known about its momentum. Frayn is interested in what can be explained and in exploring the void of what cannot.

As we watch the various speculative versions of this meeting, we see that it may have changed the course of history. Did Heisenberg - who was working on the Nazi nuclear weapons programme - come to find out from Bohr about the Allies' weapons? Or did he come to ask Bohr if there was any moral defence for what he found himself doing? And if this was the question, what was Bohr's reply? We watch each possibility - played with speed and intensity - and the effect is like a top which spins to whiteness until at last the pattern is unreadable.

The three figures exist in limbo, like living ghosts, in Michael Blakemore's stark but exciting production. David Burke is impressive as Bohr: sombre, passionate, occasionally forgetting himself in laughter. Matthew Marsh is magnificent as Heisenberg: there is tremendous charge to

his pale, tense presence. Sara Kestelman plays Margrethe Bohr with dignity and vigour. She sees things differently from the men, often catches what they miss. She never loses sight of the personal to pitch against their abstracts. The end is valedictory, dark, terrifying, but there is solace in its uncertain conclusion.

There are times when being at the Globe Theatre is like listening to early music: there is an uncanny sense of what it must have been like to be part of an Elizabethan audience. Lucy Bailey's honest, informal production of *As You Like It* suits its surroundings. On the chill afternoon when I saw it, the audience had to suffer a little for its pleasures - as all those in Arden must.

Anastasia Hille is a born Rosalind. She looks like Botticelli's Venus - though more stressed. Her Rosalind is neurotic but inspiring: a compassionate control freak. When she first bids Orlando adieu, her wave comically wishes it were a hello: a trembling flutter. Later, the school of love she runs as Ganymede has an erotic charge: breathless, dangerous.

Celia - Tonia Chauvet - is also excellent. She is outspoken but weaker than her friend. For her, love is never less than a caper. In their first scene, the two girls are delightful in grey-gold dresses. They look as though they might at any moment become airborne.

## Kellaway Observer Copenhagen



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