

Kidman and Glen blow roof off the Blue Room

The Blue Room, Donmar Warehouse

WITH Sam Mendes as the director, David Hare as the writer/adaptor and above all with the achingly beautiful Hollywood star Nicole Kidman in one of the two leading roles, this was always going to be an exceptionally hot ticket.

I have to admit, however, that I fought my way through the paparazzi fearing that we might just be in for a real bummer of an evening.

Hollywood stars don't always deliver the goods on the London stage — indeed a couple of years ago Raquel Welch was so terrible on tour that she never made it into town at all.

More worrying still, *The Blue Room* is based on Arthur Schnitzler's turn-of-the-century Viennese play *La Ronde*, much loved in the Max Ophuls film version, but a piece that almost always fails to live up to its risqué reputation on stage.

Schnitzler certainly came up with a neat and daring idea, a daisy chain of sexual encounters in which A sleeps with B who sleeps with C until we finally work our way back to A.

In performance, however, the play usually seems drearily mechanical, tritely cynical and about as sexy as cold rice pudding.

That is reckoning without the talent on display here.

Hare's free adaptation brings the piece bang up to date, set in modern London with the shadow of Aids

First Night



by Charles Spencer

Theatre Critic

looming in the background. His script is also packed with excellent jokes.

Mendes directs with precision and wit — all 10 sex scenes take place in a blackout, with a caption drily informing us just how long each coupling lasts — though this most humane of directors also finds moments of unexpected warmth undreamt of by Schnitzler.

Mark Thompson contributes a neon-lit set of impeccable minimalist cool, and there is a hip electronic score by Paddy Cuneen.

Best of all, there are Nicole Kidman and Iain Glen, each of them playing five characters apiece with bravura, skill, real feeling and a sexual charge that at times threatens to blow the roof off the theatre.

Everyone's reaction to this show is going to be conditioned by their own sexual preference.

Even I found time to notice that Iain Glen is a very handsome hunk with fine cheekbones who ranges from London cab driver through awkward student to hilariously affected playwright

with superb detail and definition.

Most of the time, though, I had eyes only for Nicole Kidman. Eyes on stalks in fact.

She's drop-dead gorgeous, bewitchingly adorable and unfortunately she doesn't get her kit off nearly as often as Mr Glen; you are, however, treated to some tantalising, willowy glimpses that are far more erotic than a brazen full-frontal.

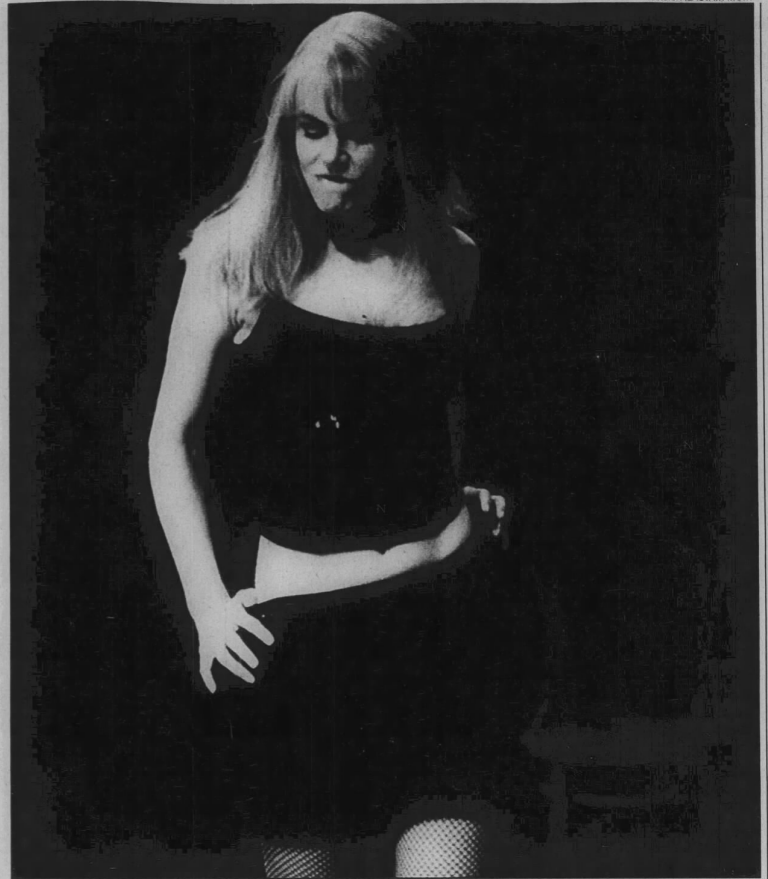
The vision of her wafting around the stage with a fag in one hand and her knickers in the other as a delicious French au pair will haunt my fantasies for months.

There is a danger of this review turning into something out of the readers' letters column in *Penthouse*, not to mention the risk of a terrible row with the wife.

So I had better add that Kidman is also a terrific actress who brings all five of her roles to instantly distinctive life, whether she's playing a cheap tart, a sophisticated married woman, a coke-sniffing waif of a model or a *femme fatale* of an actress.

The play still strikes me as a cleverly executed, glibly cynical *jeu d'esprit*, rather than a profound meditation on human relationships.

In this production, however, you might just as well lie back and enjoy the sheer style and sexuality on display: it's pure theatrical Viagra.



Picture: ALASTAIR MUIR

Who needs Hollywood? Nicole Kidman gives a bravura stage performance in *The Blue Room* at the Donmar

Blue Room Spencer Telegraph



Clipped By:

ianlharris

Mon, Sep 25,
2023