

New man can't quite rise to the occasion

I'D LOVE to say that newcomer David Lewis's serio-comic discourse on biology, psychology and sperm is a seminal drama, but it isn't. Instead, it's an engaging, deeply flawed first full-length work from a tyro writer, in which every cocksure moment of cleverness is balanced by an example of premature clumsiness. Given a poor production on the fringe, it might be dismissed out of hand. Treated with respect by director Sam Walters and a cast of experienced actors, it suggests that Lewis is definitely a writer worth watching.

Sperm Wars focuses on a marriage that is coming apart. Matt (Jeremy Crutchley) is a biology lecturer who finds his theories on male sexual supremacy fail to translate into real life. Although attractive enough to pull a young student — an affair revealed when she faxes him a photocopy of her genitals — his sperm count is too low to produce a child. His wife Lucy (Amanda Royle) puts up with his tantrums, his theories and his

Sperm Wars ○
Orange Tree, Richmond

NICK CURTIS

attempts to impregnate her with sperm donated by the dull actuary Barry (Stuart Fox) but she's nearing the end of her tether. At the heart of the story lies the question of whether humans are driven by the animal impulse to procreate or able to exercise free will, however emotionally.

Although a lot of the science comes to us only part-masticated by Lewis, it is intriguing stuff, with copious scope for jokes. "Don't

shoot off," Lucy blurts after Barry has made yet another hurried deposit in Matt's personal sperm bank. "The penis is still imperial," shouts Matt revealingly, when told the size of Barry's pride and joy in alarming centimetres.

Lewis's wit, and his intelligent use of complex scientific material, are not the problem. The play is poorly structured, with some scenes clunkingly rigged so that an argument or an insemination can be staged or that someone can dress up in a rat costume. Barry is a gross caricature, Matt's student lover Zoe (Sarah Tansey) is a cipher, and it takes Lucy ages to ask Matt the question that's been



Alastair Muir

Biology lesson: Amanda Royle as Lucy and Jeremy Crutchley as Matt

on our minds from the start: "Why are you such an arsehole?" Crutchley gives an impressive portrayal of pricked, pent-up manhood, and Royle is convincingly distraught and distracted. Sam Walters tries and fails to paper over the cracks in

Lewis's writing, but by the end you can see why he tried. This is the work of a promising, intelligent but unskilled writer, who may yet come up with the goods.

● *In rep until 17 October. Box office: 0181 940 3633.*

Silky smooth to stiffened frenzy at the flick of a twitch

THE Place's fourth annual festival of dance provided, sometimes unexpectedly, some of the most refreshing of dance-watching experiences. Chief programmer Pit Fong Loh, the choreographer and formidable

Re:Orient ★
The Place Theatre, WC1

ANNE SACKS

wispy, bleached blonde hair and

to the fingertips. Smooth moves twist into a frenzy of stiffened muscles, twitches and jerks that calm only when she emerges catatonic from her furies. She is ready now to be the cog in the wheel. The silky moves start up

glossy hair obscuring her face. Round she goes, echoing American minimalist Laura Dean's whirling Dervish dances. But as she reels and spins, her torso unwinding, we glimpse her tortured expression. The Franz

Sperm Curtis Standard



Clipped By:

ianlharris

Sat, Oct 14, 2023