

# Log jam at the cabin

**W**ERE not very well made, are we? mourns one of the forlorn characters in Michel Tremblay's wistful, dynastic play. The same cannot be said of the play itself. *The House Among the Stars* is part of Tremblay's sprawling, semi-autobiographical series exploring the lives of a troubled, French-Canadian family, and deftly blends scenes featuring three different generations in a single setting — the front porch of the ancestral log-cabin home in rural Quebec.

The intricate structure and impressive historical sweep distract attention from the fact that the play's yearning for redemptive kinship with one's family and one's home is actually rather vague and sentimental. The family becomes almost too close for comfort in Dominic Hill's cramped production, the stirring performances marred by moments of hysteria and the odd dodgy accent.

In 1910, pragmatic Victoire (Sarah Tansey) and her fantasist brother Josaphat (Jeremy Crutchley) are contemplating a move to Montreal, prompted by a dark secret surrounding the parentage of Victoire's son Gabriel. In the 1950s, the cabin has become a holiday home for the next generation: Vic-

**The House Among the Stars** ○  
*Orange Tree, Richmond*

**NICK CURTIS**

toire's unhappy daughter Albertine (Emma Gregory) and her lonely son Marcel, Albertine's rotund, flamboyantly homosexual brother Edouard (David Timson), and the "belle-soeur" (Tricia Kelly), the faithless Gabriel's fat wife. In the 1990s, the *belle-soeur's* gay son, Jean Marc (Richard Heffer), has bought the cabin and invited his lover Mathieu (Nick Fletcher) and Mathieu's young son, Sebastien, to stay.

Jean Marc is Tremblay's alter

ego, the writer who will redeem the family's fraught history and their pastoral idyll with his words. The young boys (all three played by poised youngster Robert Lowe) are the symbol of an innocence that is easily spoiled. Despite his artful eulogies to the landscape and the imagination, Tremblay's vision of an ideal, semi-pagan state of rustic bliss sounds not only unrealisable, but a bit New-Agey for sober, urban minds.

A by-product of the Orange Tree's current repertory system is that it showcases actors' versatility, or lack thereof. Tansey, Crutchley and Kelly give impressively heartfelt performances, while Timson reprises his usual tittering-imbecile persona. The 1990s strand



**Versatile: Robert Lowe and Sarah Tansey in *The House Among the Stars***

is by far the weakest in the play, with Fletcher constantly a-tremble as Mathieu, and Heffer's voice boomeranging through strange, Clouseau-esque yowls. Tremblay's

craft is impressive, but his maudlin longing for fields and family prove that, even in Quebec, nostalgia is just what it used to be.  
● *In rep. Box office: 0181 940 3633.*

## Players pass their fizzical with skidding and skipping

**D**EAR reader, you paid for a concert last night, The Orchestra of London, which was giving its first live, formal performance in the capital, is sponsored by the Evening Standard. Thereby I declare an interest.

The gentlemanly Orchestra is not a new one. It has been engaged in recording studio work since 1982. Its players are grey

**Orchestra of London ★★**  
*St John's Smith Square*

**RICK JONES**

David Nolan, was the London Philharmonic Orchestra's principal. The Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, the Hallé and the Medici and Delme String Quartets were also represented.

their music was honed with the wisdom of age and experience.

Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* overture fizzed expectantly. The semiquaver triplets skidded like a maid on a shiny floor. The stage was set. The Romanian violinist Cristina Anghelescu played Beethoven's Violin Concerto with faster fingers than the orchestra possessed at first. A sluggish, slow movement was nonetheless

precise but unaggressive beat. Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll* was calmly shaped and played with a straight, loving legato, ignoring the pianissimo at the end. Mendelssohn's *Symphony No 4*. The Italian, found the orchestra at its solid, professional best.

The saltarello was a racing thrill, but it was the solemn hymn of the second movement that stamped itself most

Tremblay Curtis Standard



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