



**Bottled rage: Colin Tierney and Elaine Lordan go some way to redeeming Harvey's mawkish melodrama**  
Picture: ALASTAIR MUIR

# The North exacts its revenge for Sir Ian

**T**HIS is alarming. Sir Ian McKellen having fled the capital and donated himself as a theatrical gift to the West Yorkshire Playhouse, Liverpool's Everyman Theatre retaliates on the regions' behalf by sending down this absolutely dire new melodrama by Jonathan Harvey. I am flabbergasted that Trevor Nunn, the National's director, and his literary manager, Jack Bradley, should have acclaimed and welcomed Guiding Star. The play strikes me as below the standard of new work regularly presented by those leading London theatres, the Royal Court the Bush, Hampstead — and the National itself. Harvey won the Evening Standard Drama Award as Most Promising Playwright in 1994 for his remarkable gay teenage romance Beautiful Thing. But the only aspects of that original talent here surviving are his Scouse wit and humour, together with a true gift for raw dialogue. Otherwise Guiding Star merely resembles a flawed trial-run or rather trial-ramble for a promising Channel 4 Liverpoolian soap opera. Harvey bombards us with so many undeveloped plots we could think ourselves plunged into conspiracy's midst. There are so many cliffhanging incidents you are left breathless with anti-climaxes. There is one important saving grace. The actors are superlative.



FIRST NIGHT

by Nicholas de Jongh

Guiding Star ○  
Cottesloe

They import conviction, passion and naturalness to a play which rarely resists cheap tears, mawkishness, deadly clichés and the flamboyant wearing of hurt hearts on sleeves. Otherwise irritations come thick and fast like mosquitoes on a damp summer evening. Bruce Macadie's set is not just gratuitously hideous to look at, it evokes little sense of a working-class Liverpool home and cannot adapt itself to the constant, cumbersome scene-changes in Gemma Bodinetz's awkwardly staged production.

Apart from a tilted backcloth of clouds the stage is dominated by two grey edifices, with doors at the base. Centre-stage, on and around the sofa, are gathered a tangle of story-lines involving the Fitzgibbon family and their neighbours, Marni and Charles Sweet. In fits and starts it transpires that Terry Fitzgibbon has been traumatised since he and his two young sons were trapped in the Hillsbor-

ough football disaster. That Terry abandons his job is just the first of the dramas and comic reliefs with which Harvey liberally drenches the play.

Tragedy and melodramatics are soap opera's constant companion. So too here. The death of the neighbours' teenage son from cystic fibrosis, the angry estrangement of Terry and his wife, Carol, the arrest of their gay teenage son, Liam, with his subsequent outing in the family circle, the near collapse of a dinghy containing Liam, his brother Laurence and girlfriend inspire a mood of lurid hecticness. None of these incidents are fully treated or considered: Terry's encounter with a prostitute in an Earl's Court bed-sitter is the height of aimlessness.

People exchange deadly clichés in angry earnest and maintain a front of rueful, sometimes amusing comic banter. Colin Tierney's Terry memorably conveys a sharp sense of bottled rage and long-term dejection. As his two sons Laurence and gay Liam, Kiernan O'Brien and Carl Rice invigorate portraits of ungainly adolescence, while Samantha Lavelle as Laurence's mindless girlfriend is a lovely distraction from the general breast-heaving.

Ratings: — ○ adequate ★ good, ★★ very good, ★★★ outstanding, X poor

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