

Theatre

Through the past darkly

Rose

Cottesloe Theatre, London

★★

Olympia Dukakis gets a standing ovation after two-and-a-half hours on stage. I wouldn't deny the power of her performance, but Martin Sherman's one-woman play, *Rose*, strikes me as a diffuse affair that seeks to find in its 80-year-old heroine an epitome of Jewish history in the 20th century.

What you get, however, is extended narration rather than compressed drama. We discover *Rose* on a wooden bench sitting shiva for the dead: engaging, that is, in an intense period of mourning. Claiming that her memory is vague, she then remembers her past with Proustian clarity.

At first, her story fascinates and horrifies. She recalls her Ukrainian shtetl (small town), marriage to a Warsaw artist, her experience of the wartime ghetto, disappearance of her husband, death of her daughter, her post-war attempt to reach Palestine on the exodus notoriously attacked by British troops and her rescue by a benign sailor who whisks her off to Atlantic City.

That takes us up to the interval and, already, *Rose* has experienced pogroms, the Holocaust and refugee displacement. In the second, less gripping half, her post-war life in America enables Sherman to raise any number of new issues. Authentic European suffering versus comfortable

American insularity. Memories of the past versus visions of the future. Above all, the generational conflict between *Rose* and her grandson, a Jewish settler who kills a Palestinian refugee child. Finally we come to realise for whom *Rose* is sitting shiva. Of course, Sherman is dealing with big issues. At times, his writing is flecked with illuminating detail.

When *Rose*'s daughter dies at a soup kitchen in the Warsaw ghetto we are chilled by the line: "Mostly water, it wasn't really soup".

But *Rose*'s experience, embracing Atlantic City dybbuks (demons), Connecticut communes and Miami hotels, is so vast it stretches credibility. Instead of a Jewish everywoman she becomes an all-purpose vehicle. And, although Sherman liberally attacks modern Israeli intransigence, his use of historical patterns and neat coincidences gives his story the air of a 19th-century novel.

Rose becomes a narrative device as much as a specific individual. That in no way detracts, however, from Dukakis's impressive performance. Without moving from her bench, in Nancy Meckler's quietly austere production she becomes the victim of unbidden memories and relives *Rose*'s suffering, sexuality and dismay at the post-war betrayal of her dreams.

Implying age rather than advertising it, Dukakis holds our attention and even manages to leap lightly over such glib one-liners as: "God is like a policeman. He's never there when you want him." It is a performance of effortless dignity that transcends Sherman's



Solo saga... Olympia Dukakis in the one-woman play *Rose* Photograph: Neil Libbert

overreaching attempt to treat *Rose* as a shifting symbol of the entire Jewish experience. **Michael Billington**

Pop

Girl with the mostest

Hole

Brixton Academy, London

★★★★

I ain't one of your Loaded-fuckin'-Maxim covergirls, snarled Courtney Love at

Hole's pre-Glastonbury warm-up gig on Thursday night, her pink angel's wings slightly askew. "I'll come down and suck your dick off." The crowd, which was full of teenage girls wearing kinderwhore dresses and tutus and oversize T shirts emblazoned with the words "WHORE" or "BABY I'M BORED", cheered loudly.

Love, vilified rock widow and Riot Grrl heroine, "does" femininity very well. From the moment she strode on stage in pink, glittery circus knickers, a satin push-up bra, half a tutu and a pair of wings, and

plunged into a forceful version of *Violet* ("Go on, take everything, take everything, I want you to!") she had the female contingent right behind her.

Literally. One by one, she would pick girls out of the crowd, haul them up on stage, and have them sit near her in an anarchic bundle, like a punk prom queen with her unruly sorority. Some she kissed, some she waltzed with, while one astonished fan had Love bury her face in her chest.

The new-look Love—all perfectly coiffured California blonde hair, tanned stomach