

**FIRST NIGHT by  
NICHOLAS DE JONGH**



London debut: Olympia Dukakis in Rose

## Scene stealer is show maker

Rose ○ Cottesloe Theatre

**R**OSE does not just require an actress to fulfil one of the greatest feats of theatrical stamina and memory in modern times. The American actress Olympia Dukakis manages all that in her London debut, without more than the odd flicker of discomfort. Her three-star triumph of a performance scales the heights as if theatrical mountaineering was as easy as strolling down Shaftesbury Avenue. It leaves me wondering why we have only seen Miss Dukakis over here as the transsexual interest in Armistead Maupin's *Tales Of The City*. But Rose, Martin Sherman's new theatre-piece, makes fierce demands on its audience as well as on this solo performer.

Rose requires you to be confined for two and a half hours with only an octogenarian Russian-Jewish woman for theatrical company, who insists on telling you her epic life-story. Almost immobile on a wooden seat in a Miami beach apartment, with only memories active and running free across the ghastly terrain of the Warsaw ghetto, Rose cuts a still-life figure, all drama done. In Samuel Beckett's *Happy Days*, the greatest of virtual monologues, the highly dramatic pathos depends on the sand which looks set to engulf the vainly chattering heroine. Rose has no such animating vigour. In Sherman's play, for all its witty astuteness and vivid eloquence, the reminiscing chatter too often takes on the quality of a leisurely charabanc tour down the arterial roads of a life. Sherman's intention though is dead serious and crucial. He wants to convey the experience of being an exiled and wandering Jew, of being a victim of the diaspora, unsure of your identity and never truly at home. But this idea is fitfully realised. Rose, whose infant daughter is shot dead in the Warsaw ghetto, lives to mourn the fact that her youthful grandson, Doron, similarly kills a young Palestinian girl in Israel. Rose's lament that her son and grandson persecute Arabs and occupy territory in a manner that outrages their religion's own history of suffering is legitimate. But there's something offensive about the way Sherman makes this death seem analogous to that of Rose's daughter's.

**T**HERE may be Jews in Israel who murder Arabs. Such men do not, however, deserve comparison with Nazi assassins. Rose believes in the Jewish past, in its dying hybrid language of Yiddish as opposed to Hebrew, in Dybbuks and in fairness to Palestines. Such convictions, when ranged against those of her son, would provide sufficient argument for one theatre-piece. Sherman, though, proves more of a relentless describer than a communicator of ideas. Rose's story becomes an over elaborated tribute to the indomitability of one wandering Jew. Her second marriage, hotel business and hippie life in San Francisco are wistfully detailed as if to prove the point. Dukakis's ravishing Rose, a bitter-sweet, frail observer of her own life, calls up the past as if she cannot resist the painful business of being in touch. The role in Nancy Meckler's production fits her like a vocation. Eyes glazed, lips pursed, voice still Russian accented, shuddering with gusts of emotion she basks in sardonic melancholia. She does not steal the show. She makes it.

Ratings: - ○ adequate ★ good, ★★ very good,  
★★★ outstanding, ✗ poor  
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