

Theatre reviews

Eurydice ★★★

Whitehall Theatre, London

Anouilh's plays are today as unfashionable as penny-farthing bicycles. So it is a real pleasure to find a 23-year-old director, Simon Godwin, importing from Battersea Arts Centre a very good production of this forgotten 1941 play. Originally performed in London as *Point of Departure*, with Dirk Bogarde and Mai Zetterling, it is filled with Anouilh's characteristic perverse romanticism.

Like most French dramatists, Anouilh was obsessed by classical myth: a way of giving the audience a familiar story while playing elegant variations upon it. Here Orpheus is a street musician saddled with a reprobate father who meets his Eurydice, a touring actress burdened with a similarly sensual mother, in a provincial station buffet. Their love is instant, rhapsodic and, of course, doomed. They abscond to a Marseilles hotel but we know, partly because of Greek myth and partly because Anouilh includes an emissary of death called Monsieur Henri, that Eurydice is fated and that her posthumous reunion with Orpheus will require a mutually heroic self-restraint.

In a sense, there is only one Anouilh play: innocent young love is always destroyed by meretricious worldlings. But here Anouilh plays intriguing variations on his stock theme. For once aged sensuality, embodied by Orpheus's father fondly dreaming of encounters with depraved blondes on mink beds, seems as seductive as youthful passion. But what gives the play extra poignancy is that, although set in the 30s, it was written during the Occupation: it is suffused with an extraordinary longing for death as a quilted release from an insufferable reality.

Of course, the play is highly artificial: as critic Harold Clurman brilliantly remarked, French dramatists of the 40s made life look like theatre whereas now we expect theatre to look like life. But I found myself enjoying, in a mood of acrid nostalgia, Anouilh's heightened theatricality. For the second time in two days I was also impressed by a set by Agnes Treplin: the first was at an excellent Drama Centre revival of Kleist's *The Broken Jug* and here her atmospheric evocation of French railway stations and cheap hotels shows how much she is at home in Europe.

Simon Godwin's production also boasts a strong cast. Orlando Seale and Amy Marston as the young lovers disrobe their souls with great candour. Susan Tracy as Eurydice's mother is wreathed in actressy charm and Desmond Barrit is quietly wise as the fedora-adorned harbinger of death. But the richest performance comes from Edward de Souza who gloriously turns Orpheus's

lecherously reminiscing dad into a station-buffet Falstaff. It all makes for a bitter-sweet evening that reminds us of the Gallic theatricality we thoughtlessly threw out along with the unmourned French window.

Michael Billington

Till August 13. Booking: 0171-369 1735.

Making History ★★★

Peacock Theatre, Dublin

The cultural nationalism of the old Field Day group - Seamus Heaney, Tom Paulin, Seamus Deane and, until he baled out a decade ago, playwright Brian Friel - reached its apogee in Friel's raw, humanistic treatments of the legacies of colonisation. *Making History* fans the embers of late-16th-century Ulster history, and the enigmatic figure of clan chieftain Hugh O'Neill, routed at the Battle of Kinsale in 1601 - a defining moment in the demise of old Gaelic culture.

Friel examines the brutal pragmatism of Empire from the standpoint of an imagined, modernised O'Neill. An adept politician, soldier and native aristocrat, O'Neill was ennobled as Earl of Tyrone under Elizabeth I. But as a result of his open revolt in 1595, Elizabeth crushed Ulster

★★★★ Unmissable ★★★★★ Recommended ★

Exclusive Readers' T

Eddie Izzard



He was fast, furious, vulgar and funny and changed the face of comedy forever. Legendary American comedian Lenny Bruce was the epitome of the sixties, ground-breaking, extremely hip and constantly at odds with authority. Who else could play the tiller-roler other than the ultimate rock and roll comedy star, Eddie Izzard?

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