

Volcanic shock

ZINNIE Harris's enthralling adventure of a play marks a departure from stale, well-furrowed theatrical terrain. It begins in 1961 on an isolated, mid-atlantic island, akin to Tristan da Cunha. Miss Harris describes the impact of environmental disaster and capitalist greed upon four closely attached people in this primitive society where time has dawdled if not stood ill. Eventually forced by an erupting volcano to sail away to Southampton, the islanders discover little but unhappiness in exile; ingeniously related strands of plot are in the end gathered together, though in too leisurely a fashion.

To watch *Further than the Furthest Thing* is akin to observing a strange, backward society. To hear the islanders speaking, in Miss Harris's sparse though eloquent pigeon-English, is like listening to messages in code. You cannot quite gather their significances or motives. Niki Turner's design relies upon a turquoise backcloth over which hangs the volcano's black mass. And a network of piping denotes Mr Hansen's Southampton factory. Not all locations are clearly evoked, but the atmosphere pulsates with undercurrents of unease.

Kevin McMonagie's elderly Bill unknowingly hears pre-volcanic rumbling when he swims in a mountain lake. Less threatening disturbance is precipitated by the

FURTHER THAN THE FURTHEST THING ★★

Cottesloe, National Theatre

Nicholas de Jongh

return of his wife's nephew — Gary McNnes, impressive as the confused and angry Francis. The youth arrives with a shadowy businessman, Mr Hansen, eager to turn the island into a factory for bottling crayfish. Rebecca (Arlene Cockburn), pregnant by person unknown, precipitates an after-birth shock of her own. But Bill's wife Mill, whose naivety, canniness and suppressed anguish are rivetingly transmitted in Paola Dionisotti's poignant performance, springs the greatest shock when she spills a confession that explains the islanders' guilt.

This Tron Theatre Glasgow and National Theatre co-production is masterfully directed by Irina Brown who fashions scenes of violent beauty and imagist starkness. Miss Dionisotti throws herself head-down upon the cherished suit in which her husband married her. And Gary Yershon's music for cimbalom strikes suitably haunting notes.

● Until 28 October. Box Office: 020 7452 3000.

Ratings: ○ adequate

★ good, ★★ very good,

★★★ outstanding, X poor



Poignant performance: Paola Dionisotti

Further de Jongh Standard

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