



Duncan Bell and Fritha Goodey in Remembrance of Things Past

Picture: ALASTAIR MUIR



Dream of a play is a truly memorable Remembrance

RAVISHING is the word for it. Marcel Proust's vast novel, his reminiscence of childhood, love and desire in high French society, has been triumphantly compressed, distilled and transmuted for performance on stage. Those of us who have only dipped into Proust's deep waters and never had the courage to take the plunge will be unable to judge how far Harold Pinter's theatre version, adapted from his never-filmed 1972 cinema script, is faithful to the author. But that's beside the theatrical point. Director Di Trevis, who co-adapted Pinter's script, has created a thrilling three-hour reverie, a theatrical dream-scape which drifts between the comic and the sad. One man's past plays before him in a jumbled rush of scenes, sights and sounds that at last capture the essence of his life and lost times.

There's no simple narrative or dramatic line of development to follow. But it's a bewitching process, watching the free-play of Marcel's memory, as envious time ages or kills off old friends and secrets are coaxed into the open. Sebastian Harcombe's fearful, sexually ambivalent Marcel is by turns dejected voyeur and participant in the action. Pinter's script proves once again how brilliant he is at showing how the games of sexual warfare are played and how the techniques of social aggression hit home with just the deadly flick of an adjective. He briskly conveys the provocations of Marcel's beautiful bisexual lover, Indira Varma's Albertine and the supreme haughtiness of David Rintoul's gay Baron Charlus, who wears his head held high without the morals to match. And in an atmosphere pulsating with all manner of erotic desires Fritha Goodey's Odette oozes rampant sex appeal.

Dominic Muldowney's limpid, Ravel-like piano music sounds elegaic notes. The stage is bare, save for a piano, gold-painted upright chairs, tables with vases of lilies and, on the floor, a picture turned away from us. This Remembrance of Things past begins appropriately in childhood: a moustachioed, wheezing Marcel catches a glimpse of his unhappy young self, calmed by Judy



FIRST NIGHT

by Nicholas de Jongh

Remembrance of Things Past ★★
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Campbell's grandmother, when Mr Swann comes visiting. Again and again Miss Trevis emphasises the dream-struck atmosphere by her stylised direction. She freezes the action, with characters rendered as motionless as wax-works tableaux. The older, moustachioed Marcel arrives at the Duchess of Guermantes to find the elderly guests as still as still-life. They flare briefly into conversation with all the ardour of guttering flames.

The grand snobberies and vacuousness of Marcel's aristocratic circle are beautifully caught, too. Diana Hardcastle's gloriously languid Duchess of Guermantes is far too pressed to sympathise with Duncan Bell's dying Swann. But when John Bett's Duke notices his wife is wearing the wrong-coloured shoes there's plenty of time to change her foot-wear. Janine Duvitski's social climbing Madame Verdurin simpers dutifully in the gracious presence of royalty but is not above spreading a little free-lance malice too. David Rintoul's Charlus is an exquisite comic creation, basking in the higher reaches of camp. In the male brothel, his hankering for humiliation at last betrays his real self.

But it is Sebastian Harcombe's Marcel who makes this Remembrance so memorable. Wreathed in anxiety, dread and sexual insecurity he has the air of a man forced to watch his life rushing by in painful retrospect. And in the finale, when possessed by past time he catches the ecstatic tones of a man coming home.

Ratings: - ○ adequate ★ good, ★★ very good, ★★★ outstanding, X poor More reviews: Page 61
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