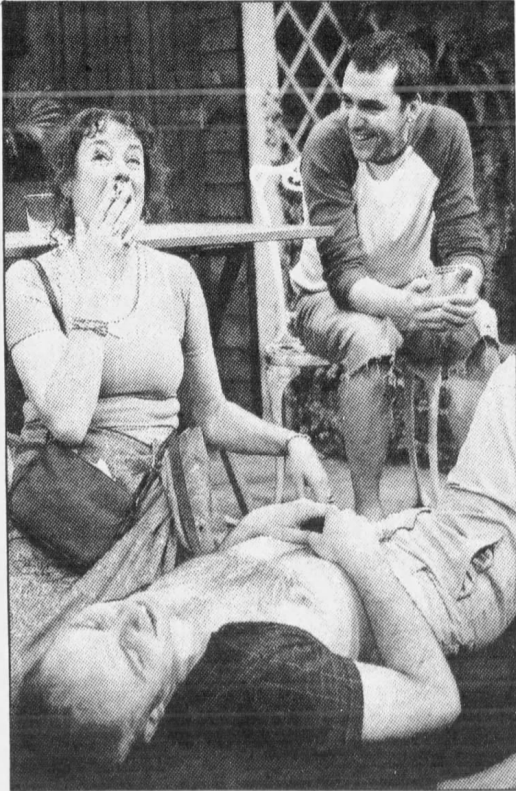


Struggle to out artist's talent



Dalston deception: Mark Bonnar (foreground), Linda Bassett and Sean Gallagher

SOMEWHERE inside Jonathan Harvey is a serious, thoughtful playwright struggling half-heartedly to escape. If only he succeeded.

Out in the Open finds Harvey in need of a script editor to cut and clarify his meandering plot with its comic diversions. For although the play depends too much on coincidences and photographs, it does convincingly show how often intimate relationships are troubled by subterfuge, deception and secrets. But Harvey, hooked on the quick fix of clever one-liners in his TV comedy style, loses track of his theme in a wasteland of loose-tongued, though quirkily amusing, repartee.

The scene is a Dalston garden one summer weekend. Michael Taylor's set, festooned with plants, barbecue and vulgar fairy lights, resembles Ayckbourn's hetero land. But this is Harvey, homo terrain: 33-year-old Scottish Tony, who serves in Harvey Nicks, has picked up 21-year-old Iggy and tries to take his first sexual plunge since his lover, Frankie, was fatally struck by lightning months ago. Tony's alcoholic flatmate protectively conceals a sexual secret and Michele Austin's fat waitress, who parades theatrical and lesbian aspirations, serves as a crude comic

OUT IN THE OPEN ○

Hampstead Theatre

Nicholas de Jongh

fall-girl. It sounds tritely gay-familiar material, but isn't.

The situation, with Tony and Iggy knowing far more about each other than they let on, gives their close encounter and their post mortem into Tony's relationship with Frankie a fascinating piquancy. James McAvoy, superlative as Iggy, loses his cocky social equilibrium and succumbs to real, raw pain, and Mark Bonnar's Tony is almost as powerful in Kathy Burke's sympathetic though long-winded production. But Linda Bassett as Frankie's bereft Cockney mother, brilliantly hiding her grief and resentments in a barrage of mindless, intrusive chatter, becomes a grand comic distraction from Harvey's important, though insufficiently explored, theme.

● Until 14 April. Box office: 020 7722 9301.

Ratings: ○ adequate, ★ good, ★★ very good, ★★★ outstanding, ✕ poor

Out de Jongh Standard

Clipped By:
ianlharris

19 Apr 2026