Ticket Holders

by

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Loot

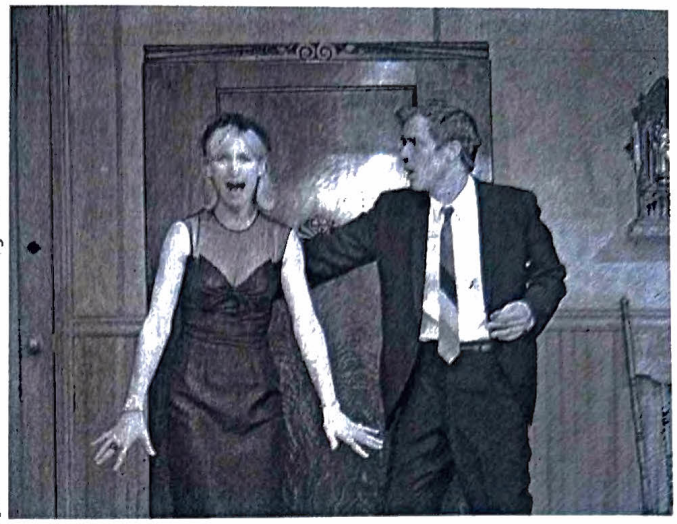
Theatre East

There's always something slightly bittersweet about seeing one of the amazing few plays written by Joe Orton before his shocking demise at the untimely age of 34. Though his first play *Ruffian on the Stair,* began his brief but meteoric career to skyrocket when it was broadcast on the BBC in 1964, it was his next three savagely satirical and highly outrageous comedies that defined Orton: *Entertaining Mr. Sloane, What the Butler Saw* (first presented posthumously in the West End in 1969, two years after his lover Kenneth Halliwell bashed his skull in with a hammer), and this one, *Loot,* which rocked London theatre circles in that previously more genteel Lerner-and-Lowe-dominated period in time.

I always use the career of Orton as an example to defend the urgent and vital role of the theatre critic in our society. If it hadn't been for those brave London journalistic pariahs during the late 50s and early 60s, there never would have been the historic body of outrageously dark and twisted work by Edward Bond, John Osbourne or Orton, creating the iconic plays that survived that era and paved the way for so many playwrights to follow. These were the courageous reviewers who said, "Yeah, sure, check out *My Fair Lady,* but don't overlook *Saved.* Or *Look Back in Anger.* Or *Loot.*" They guys were my heroes. Of course, right behind the genius playwrights who gave them something new and audacious to champion.

Loot totally changed the landscape of what was acceptable and what was not when it debuted in 1966 and today, it's just as clever, just as hilarious, and just as wicked as when Orton first conceived it in the couple's dingy one-room bedsitter at number 25 Noel Road, Islington, plunked out unceremoniously on the pawnshop manual Smith & Wesson typewriter originally given him by Halliwell to encourage the youthful uneducated novice he

adored to write.



Sile Bermingham - Brian Foyster

With its delightfully skewed morality and subtle indictments against everything plaguing the evolution of the human condition from sentimentality to Scotland Yard, from the first glance at Mrs. McLeavy's soon-to-be outrageously abused corpse dominating the comfortably intimate Theatre East stage as the audience enters into set designer Joel Daavid's excellent period flat the breakneck ride Orton intended his audiences to barely survive unscathed still leaves one a bit exhausted by final curtain, which here then proves even more visually scandalous as the lights come up on anything but that traditional line of happy faces ready to take a bow. Think: Merchant-Ivory meets the Mitchell Brothers.

What this hilarious and meticulously staged mounting has going for it first and foremost is Darin Anthony, one of LA's best young actors who has now moved into definite director-to-watch status with this production. If Anthony proved himself already this season by tackling the difficult comedic challenges of Amy and David Sedaris in the ever-extended *Book of* [illegible] still filling up houses at the Blank, he puts the cheery on top with his work here at Theatre East. The ensemble cast of his *Loot* is a knockout, but without a directorial eye as original as Anthony's, the demanding and prickly words of Little Joe—and the need for perfect precise comedic physicality to keep, if you'll excuse the expression, all of Orton's ba[illegible] the air simultaneously—never quite works. Here it does.

Anthony's vision of *Loot* pays quintessential honor to the memory of one of the [illegible] century's greatest and most groundbreaking talents, a man whose life was not really ende[illegible] prematurely by a crazed lover—a guy whom I was luckily enough to play in the west coa[illegible] premiere of Lanie Robertson's brilliant *Nasty Little Secrets* at Theatre/Theater in 20[illegible] winning me my cherished LA Drama Critic's Circle Award, a Maddy, and a Best Act[illegible] nomination from *LA Weekly*, thus solidifying my connection to this lost playwrighting ge[illegible] for life, it seems—but by the just pre-Stonewall society in which they existed that deem[illegible] them pariahs for the life they shared.

What Orton might have accomplished had he lived more than three-and-a-[illegible] decades on the planet is nearly unimaginable and sufficiently tragic. To me Orton and Halliwell were both destroyed by the proper societal rules of the era that refused to recognize or accept their love-that-speaks-no name, a boulder which teetered ominously over their heads, growing ever bigger as Orton's star rose and Halliwell careened ever [illegible] edge of sanity. Had they survived only a few years longer, they would have been left to live however they chose. Of course, this too was a time before George Dubya and the other currently prevailing Regency rakes unleashed their offensive Offensive to take control of the kingdom once again. How Joe Orton would have met the challenge we'll sadly never know.

LOOT plays through Oct. 2 at Theatre East, 6760 Lexington Av., Hollywood. For ticket [illegible] 957-578[illegible]

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