

Review: Oscar Wilde, the David Hare way, in 'Judas Kiss' at Boston Court Pasadena

By F. KATHLEEN FOLEY | MAR 08, 2019 | 11:50 AM



Rob Nagle gives a towering performance as Oscar Wilde in "The Judas Kiss" at Boston Court Pasadena. (Jenny Graham)

An intellectual's intellectual, playwright David Hare specializes in a kind of theatrical exegesis, exploring the philosophical motivations behind immensely complicated characters.

No exception to that rule, "The Judas Kiss," now at Boston Court Pasadena, painstakingly reassesses a tragic figure undone by the conventions of his time. Those who consider themselves conversant with the circumstances of Oscar Wilde's fall from grace may find Hare's 1998 play a revelation.

The action opens in London's Cadogan Hotel as two staff members, waiter Arthur (Matthew Campbell Dowling) and newly hired maid Phoebe (Mara Klein), cavort *in flagrante*. When hotel manager Sandy (Will Dixon) interrupts their tryst, he's remarkably casual about the situation — possibly because he has also been carrying on with the sexually omnivorous Arthur after hours.

As the trio scurries to straighten the disordered room, Wilde's longtime friend and former lover, Robbie Ross (Darius De La Cruz) arrives, along with Wilde's current innamorato, the feckless Lord Alfred "Bosie" Douglas (Colin Bates), the engine of Wilde's current predicament.



Wilde, center, advised by Lord Alfred "Bosie" Douglas (Colin Bates) as former lover Robbie Ross (Darius De La Cruz) looks on in "The Judas Kiss" at Boston Court Pasadena. (Jenny Graham)

Oscar Wilde (Rob Nagle), having braved the baying crowds of Londoners and reporters gathered outside the hotel, finally arrives. Robbie is there to spirit Wilde to a boat imminently departing England. At this point, Wilde's course seems clear — to flee before he is taken into custody. But with Bosie murmuring poisonous advice in his ear, Wilde famously, stupidly delays — as if insensible to his own impending doom.

Act II picks up Wilde two years later, after a purgatorial incarceration that entailed six hours a day on the treadmill, a starvation diet and a wooden bed in a filthy cell. Living in Naples, Italy, without the money for a decent meal, he is once again in the thrall of Bosie, who has joined him in exile. But as Wilde will soon learn, Bosie's loyalty is more expedient than enduring, and Wilde must finally face the sad fact that he has sacrificed all for a ludicrously unworthy love.

In a beautifully paced and sensitive staging, director Michael Michetti has assembled a mostly workmanlike cast that deftly handles the permutations of Hare's challenging text. The action unfolds in Se Hyun Oh's minimalistic scenic design, well lighted by David Hernandez, with costume designer Dianne K. Graebner cladding Nagle in epicene finery.

The problem of this production — if it can be said to be a problem — is that Nagle gives such a towering performance that he threatens to dwarf all those in his orbit. A fixture on local stages, Nagle is known for thoughtful portrayals — but seems like the role he was born to play. Full of bluster, bravado and pathos, his Wilde is nature's gentleman and fortune's fool, putting his authentic self on display in defiance of his time. In a performance not to be missed, Nagle shows us the internalized anguish behind Wilde's deceptive passivity — the thwarted brilliance and loss behind his valiant savoir-faire.



'The Judas Kiss'

Where: Boston Court Pasadena, 70 N. Mentor Ave.

When: 8 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays, 2 p.m. Sundays, through March 24. Also 8 p.m. March 18.

Tickets: \$39

Info: (626) 683-6801, www.bostoncourtpasadena.org

Running time: 2 hours, 40 minutes

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