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THE JUDAS KISS

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WOW!

What he did for love. What he sacrificed for love. What he suffered for love. Playwright David Hare asks audiences to ponder whether Oscar Wilde's unconditional devotion to Lord Alfred Douglas was worth the years of pain he endured in *The Judas Kiss*, the powerful, provocative latest from The Theatre @ Boston Court.



Unlike the 1997 Stephen Fry/Jude Law flick *Wilde*, Hare's 1998 play focuses on just two pivotal moments in Wilde's life, the hours before his arrest on April 5, 1895 on charges of "gross indecency" and a single day in December of 1897 after two years of forced hard labor behind bars.



It's an approach that demands of those unfamiliar with the events leading up to Wilde's trial and his subsequent imprisonment to piece together how Robbie Ross (Darius De La Cruz) initiated married-with-children Oscar (Rob Nagle) into his innate sexual orientation, how a meeting with the stunningly beautiful "Bosie" (Colin Bates) developed into a volatile two-and-a-half year relationship with a man for whom monogamy was anathema, how Bosie's father's public defamation of his son's much older lover led to Wilde's unsuccessful lawsuit for slander and ultimately to criminal charges and two years in prison for homosexual acts that remained criminal in England until 1967.



There is, fortunately, method behind Hare's unconventional approach, just one of several reasons why *The Judas Kiss* adds up to more than two and a half hours of thought-and-discussion-provoking dramatic fireworks.

The pre-arrest day that Oscar spends in a London hotel catering to those of his persuasion give us an up-close-and-personal (albeit open-for-interpretation) glimpse at the man behind the quotable quips.



Are we to admire Oscar for not abandoning his principles or is he to be pitied for loving a man unworthy of his affections? Would a decision to cut and run be a cowardly denial of love, a masochistic desire to suffer, or is it the only sane answer to Victorian morality?

Expect to be spending much of intermission debating these points, that is when you're not asking yourself whether Oscar has seen the last of the young man for whom he gave up everything and wondering just when and how the titular Judas Kiss will be delivered.

Expect too to be talking too about the prodigiously gifted Nagle's career-redefining Oscar and the angelic-featured Bates' stunningly complex Bosie, a pair of star turns fine-tuned by master director Michael Michetti.



A half-dozen recent lead roles may have scored Nagle a pair of L.A. Stage Star Of The Year Scenies, but no previous performance will prepare admirers for his remarkable transformation, both physical and emotional, into Oscar Wilde in all his grandeur, his vulnerability, his recklessness, his compassion, and his heart.



Bates proves a couldn't-be-better

choice for Bosie, childishly sulky, self-servingly insensitive, and utterly irresistible. A less sympathetic actor might have us wondering what Oscar sees in this spoiled brat. With Bates in the role, we understand why Wilde is forever smitten.



De La Cruz provides stalwart support as the sole voice of sanity in Oscar's life, Kurt Kanazawa's Galileo Masconi impresses both for his impeccable Italian and unabashed nudity, and Will Dixon, Matthew Campbell Dowling, and Mara Klein deliver the goods as a trio of hotel employees, though an opening sex scene between hotel porter Will and chambermaid Phoebe seems gratuitous in more ways than one.



Scenic designer Se Hyun Oh gives The Judas Kiss's Act Two Italian hotel room a stark, striking beauty, particularly as lit to sunrise-to-sunset perfection by David Hernandez, but the black-velvet curtain first-act backdrop recalls too many budget-challenged black-box designs.

Dianne K. Graebner's elegant Victorian menswear and hotel staff uniforms, Courtney Lynn Dusenberry's terrific late-1800s props, Shannon Hutchins' just-right Oscar wig, and Peter Bayne's mood-enhancing music and sound design are topnotch. So too is Nike Doukas's spot-on accent coaching and Michele Scotto's Italian coaching.

Bobby Gutierrez is assistant director. Victoria Hoffman is casting director. Karen Osborne is production stage manager and Ben Altman is assistant stage manager.



With the art-house pic *The Happy Prince* having recently scored its writer-director-star Rupert Everett career-best raves, the time could not be riper for *The Judas Kiss* to bring L.A. theater audiences to their feet. Be prepared to stand up and cheer.

The Theatre @ Boston Court, 70 N. Mentor Ave., Pasadena. Through March 24.
Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays at 8:00. Sundays at 2:00. Also Monday, March 18 at 8:00. Reservations: 626 683-6883
www.bostoncourt.org

—Steven Stanley
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Photos: Jenny Graham