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“The Judas Kiss” Reflecting the Imagery of Martyrdom

ENTERTAINMENT, FEATURED, ON STAGE, PLAYS, THE ARTS, THEATER



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54 VIEWS



By Ernest Kearney — There are particular products, —merchandise, institutions and other...stuff— exports from the U.K., which the rest of the world sometimes finds difficulty to appreciate.

But not so we Americans; we're just outright baffled by them.

I refer to such English delicacies as jellied eels, spotted dick or stargazy pie; traditions the likes of cheese rolling on Cooper's Hill or encasing oneself entirely in outfits of straw on Strawberry Day, and it goes without saying this includes anything at all having to do with the game of cricket. ** % **

These certain commodities are so alien to us that the designation "British" could just as easily be "Venusian" or "Trafamadorian."

The plays of **David Hare** tend to fall into this category.

Best known to American audiences for his screenplays of *The Hours* (2002) and *The Reader* (2008), Hare's plays tend to be harsh analysis of British institutions that lay outside of our interest or understanding.

The Secret Rapture (1988) deals with disruptions Thatcherism has on the family of a deceased bureaucrat, the English trial system is assailed in *Murmuring Judges* (1991); in *Racing Demon* (1990) the target is the Church of England; *The Permanent Way* (1991) examines the privatization of the country's railways; while *The Absence of War* (1993) is based on the Labour Party's defeat in the General Election of 1992.

With few exceptions, the intrinsic Englishness of his efforts often poses as an impediment to non-British audiences fully appreciating his works or admiring Hare's talents.

His 1978 play *Plenty*, which was adapted into the 1985 film starring Meryl Streep, is one of these exceptions, and another can currently be enjoyed at the **Boston Court Theatre**.

The Judas Kiss is a two-act work on the Irish playwright and wit Oscar Wilde and deals with aspects of the infamous libel trial he undertook against the Marquess of Queensberry, the father of his young lover Lord Alfred Douglas known to all as "Bosie."

Queensberry had quarreled with Wilde publicly over the playwright's relationship with his son which came to a head when he accused Wilde of being a "posing sodomite (sic)."

Most of Wilde's friends strenuously advised him against charging Queensberry with libel, reminding him not only of the power of Queensberry's standing but also that the charges he made of Wilde were true.

Wilde, ignoring their wise counsel proceeded with the case that he would lose; leading to his disgrace, imprisonment, estrangement from his family, and eventually his death at 46 while living in poverty and exile in France.

The tragedy of Wilde is a tale well-prodded, where Hare's originality lays in his transposing, as the title indicates, the Christ myth over Wilde's downfall.

Setting the first act in 1895 immediately after the verdict has come in against him, Wilde (**Rob Nagle**) arrives at the fashionable Cadogan Hotel with his friend Robert Ross (**Darius De La Cruz**) who argues for Wilde to employ all haste in leaving for the continent before his arrest comes.

Wilde resists, bantering with the hotel's manager (**Matthew Campbell Dowling**) and staff (**Mara Klein** and **Will Dixon**), insisting on lunch until the arrival of Bosie (**Colin Bates**) who clamors for Wilde to remain and confront his father, which ensures Wilde's arrest.

Hare sets the second act in Italy two years later, where Wilde and Bosie are sharing rooms in a flea bag Neapolitan hotel. There, while Ross informs Wilde that this reunion, forbidden by his family, has cost him what meager financial support his wife had been extending, Bosie is out playing with Galileo (**Kurt Kanazawa**) a handsome Italian fisherman with whom he's become infatuated.

Over all this, Hare has draped a silken Gethsemane of great artistry, merging the stories of two individuals who faced their approaching martyrdoms not only with acceptance but appeared to have welcomed them.

Director **Michael Michetti** has brought about a visually lush production with assistance from scenic designer **Se Hyun Oh**, costumes by **Dianne K. Graebner**, wigs by **Shannon Hutchins** and Courtney Lynn



Dusenberry accounting for the props.

Nor are the contributions of lighting designer **David Hernandez** and **Peter Bayne's** sound designer and composer to be discounted.

Michetti realized the problems of the piece, that the first act is about the refusal of the protagonist to take actions, and in the second act, "He does it again." And it can't be said he addresses these issue with any success.

Michetti may be taken to task for some directorial decisions such as a weak staging of the final image in a second act already suffering from an anemia of dramatic tension and deciding not to have his Wilde show the physical effects of his imprisonment which would lead to his premature death.

But he has mounted a stunningly beautiful production and collected a superb cast to perform in it.

It was commonly agreed on by critics, that casting was the primary problem with the original 1998 production which featured Tom Hollander, who was adjudged a suitable Bosie and Liam Neeson as Wilde, who was not.

The cast at the **Boston Court**, topped by the strong performances of **Bates** and **De La Cruz**, are hard to find fault with.

With **Nagle** in the role of Wilde, praise reaches its pinnacle.

One of the thorniest challenges an actor can face is in taking on the role of a historical figure who has undergone a multitude of interpretations at the hands of others is to succeed in making it their own.

Nagle surmounts this apparent Everest of difficulties, and does so seemingly in a single bound.

His performance joined with the elegance of **Michetti's** staging is ample enough reason for a full-hearted recommendation of this show.

(Featured Image: **Colin Bates, Rob Nagle** in "The Judas Kiss" (photo by Jenny Graham / Courtesy of Boston Court Pasadena)



The Judas Kiss

Remaining Performances through March 24th

at the

Boston Court Theatre

70 N Mentor Ave

Pasadena, California 91106

For Schedule, Tickets and Information

(626) 683-6801

www.BostonCourtPasadena.org



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