

PROFESSIONAL THEATRE REVIEW

BOSTON COURT THEATRE PASADENA THE JUDAS KISS REVIEW

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SEALED BY A KISS

If one were to predict how a play about the famous (and notorious) **Oscar Wilde** would begin, she could predict a steamy bedroom



encounter between Oscar himself and “Bosie”, often regarded – and rightfully so – as the villain of the Irish poet/playwright’s life’s story. However, **David Hare**, this playwright, chooses a different approach. How about a heterosexual romp in Oscar’s own bed between a manservant and a frisky maid at his hotel room residence in which he has been staying for the last five months? Whuh?

The above description pertains to the **Boston Court** production of **THE JUDAS KISS** now playing in **Pasadena** thru **March 24**. Of course the opening scene prepares the audience to explore the strictures of a Victorian society that can be both harsh in its moral judgments in public in contrast to its real nature behind closed doors. The behavior of many in private can be as randy as ever, but it is Oscar’s choice to

conceal his predilections in a shocking public exercise which leads the audience to an examination of the drama's key themes of love and betrayal.



If one is lucky enough, director **Michael Michetti** can lead the unfamiliar down the path of understanding of the motivations and realities of Oscar's own betrayal not only thru his own choices, but also those of his lover "Bosie". This theatre enthusiast welcomed the pre-show lecture by the director and also the lessons offered by his masterful staging of a brilliant play that happens to be peopled by an ensemble of extraordinary actors. This thrilling production immediately rises to the top of my 2019 theatre experiences. Let me explore its impact.

At the center of the play is the larger than life raconteur, lecturer, playwright and poet **Oscar Wilde**, embodied in the often astonishing



performance by **Rob Nagle**. Yes, one can easily observe his need for fame, his self-assurance, his irritating habits, and his unfettered romantic attentions to the Lord Alfred “Bosie” Douglas of **Colin Bates**, the epitome of classic Greek beauty. Mr. Bates manages to stay

right in step with the grandiosity of Nagle’s accomplishment, always fawning, massaging his ego and leading him down a thorny path in pursuit of Bosie’s own selfish desires. The audience keenly observes the unshakable bond between the two “artists”, even as Oscar continues to spew some of those epigrams for which he is famous.

Act I of the play finds Oscar dealing with the consequences of his failure in the very public courtroom challenge to the lurid charges of “indecentcy”



brought by Bosie's father, the **Marquess of Queensberry**. Likely to be arrested, Oscar, as a result, faces several unpopular choices. His longtime friend "Robert Ross", soundly played by **Darius De La Cruz**, earnestly and urgently counsels him to leave **London** at once. Scandal!

The amusing, yet lusty duo of manservant "Arthur Wellesley" and maid "Phoebe Cane", in and out of garments, often are in focus during the act with nuanced portrayals by the very talented **Matthew Campbell Dowling** and **Mara Klein** respectively. Similarly, the Maitre



d'Hotel "Sandy Moffatt", acted by **Will Dixon**, avidly caters to Oscar's every whim, serving as a counterpoint to Mr. Wilde's reluctance to engage in a change of course. And also, hearkening back to the earlier observation about private Victorian mores, the audience witnesses Mr. Moffatt and Arthur in quiet negotiation themselves about a proposed discreet encounter later (apparently Arthur's reputation suggests that he lustfully dilly

dallies on both sides of the corridor so to speak). At any rate there's plenty of activity going on in Act I, but very little of it has to do with Oscar who remains fixated on what Bosie thinks. He plants himself, relaxes, extemporizes on aesthetic ideals and even orders an elaborate dinner as he awaits society's reckoning.

If a fan of Oscar Wilde's literary contributions (this critic counts himself among them), one might recall his famous plays, notably *THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST*, *LADY WINDERMERE'S FAN*, *A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE*, *AN IDEAL HUSBAND* or even the controversial *SALOME*. His novel **THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY** also has considerable charms as well. His greatest achievement, though, might be the poetic, autobiographical "The **BALLAD OF READING GAOL**" in which Oscar reveals his despair in his reflections while incarcerated.



It is following his release from that prison, after authoring the introspective unburdening of his soul (the **De Profundis** letter), that the audience finds the broken Oscar, devoid of his usual flamboyance, in the company of Bosie in Italy, living without status and almost penniless, yet still devoted to his ideal love hoisted on a pedestal in his own mind. Act II, therefore, explores the meaning of that “love”



between Oscar and his paramour.

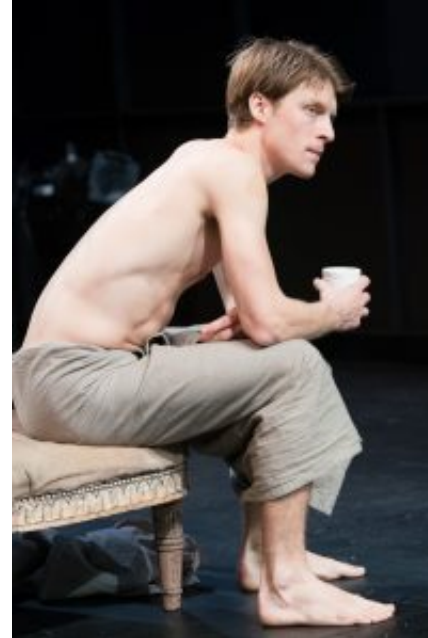
Bosie has continued the life of a bon vivant (without luxury this time), enjoying a festive existence with the locals, ever ready to sing, dance and dabble in pleasure with those men

who are similarly inclined. Enter **Kurt Kanazawa** (“Galileo Masconi”), the latest Bosie “boy toy” to catch his fancy. Even so, the audience notices a shift in the inseparable bond with Oscar, especially when the issue of money rises to the surface. By the way, Mr. Kanazawa’s set decoration accomplishment is beyond reproach, even though it falls

short of being seminal to the play. Oh...and his acting enlivens the scene as well.

The **Boston Court**'s production of **David Hare's** ***THE JUDAS KISS*** now affecting audiences thru **March 24**, represents a stunning achievement by **Mr. Michetti**, his creative team supporting the director's aims and his sterling cast and crew as well. Take a bow, ladies and gentlemen!

Even though **Oscar Wilde's** status as a gay icon lives on, an exploration of its genesis may induce some questioning of this reputation's authenticity. An insightful examination of this important play may lead one to begin that process, notwithstanding a celebration of **Oscar Wilde's** always surprising wit, plus his undeniable, worthy contributions as a man of letters.



pc: Jenny Graham

Theatre Curtain Calling... Reviewing the Situation



Bill