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THEATRE REVIEW

### Mating Rituals of the Urban Duck Burton Taylor Theatre, 7.30pm daily until Sat 26th Feb

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Mating Rituals of the Urban Duck, by Daniel James, is showing at the Burton Taylor as part of the OUDS New Writing Festival. It is, in essence, a fairly light comedy about first love. There are four characters, the traditional two guys and two gifs, and the play covers a period of ten years. The play is performed backwards – Memento style – with each scene taking place some time before the last. There is an explanatory note to this effect in the programme.

The play begins with couple Jess (Emma Stephany) and Sam (Simon Demetriou) preparing to go out to a book launch. They are obviously having Problems, Sam making some implausible excuse to slope off to some other engagement. This prior engagement, it is eventually revealed, is with Naomi (Katie-Anne Berk), an old girlfriend, currently involved with Jess' brother Oli (Andrew Feld). As the play unfolds, the full history of these four characters is revealed. These four characters are well written and well performed, distinctive and strongly characterised.

Although light-hearted, the play is rather ambitious: the events it chronicles unfold (back-

Until Thu 24th Feb Phoenix Picture House (512526) HE SEA INSIDE [15] Thu: 3.30.9.00 ...a. Mar Adentitu. spann.... ANITY FAIR [PG] ...d. Couliek costume drama with ... Reese Witherspoon?! Thu: 3.30.6.20 Ultimate Picture Palace (245288) VERA DRAKE [12A] Thu: 9.30n Odeon George St (0871 2244 007) rith Jude Law, Julia Roberts, Natalie Port RIMINAL [15] Thu: 1.15, 3.45, 6.15, 8.45p xcellent con-artist movie with John C. Reilly. From Argentinian film "Nine Queers". N GOOD COMPANY [12A] Thu: 2.30, 5.00, 7.45pr ennis Quaid's new boss is sleeping with his daughter. Quaid's daughter, that is. MEET THE FOCKERS [12A] Thu: 5.15, 8.00 MERCHANT OF VENICE [PG] Thu: 1.00, 6.30pr OCEAN'S TWELVE [12A] Thu: 12.00, 2.45, 5.30, 8.15p Sick heist seauel with Brad. George. and Matt. And Bruce. HALL WE DANCE? [12A] Thu: 1.00, 3.30, 6.00, 8.30ps id I say that it's Richard Gere & J-Lo who are asking? ON OF THE MASK [PG] n activities carteorist's infant son stumbles upon the mask of Loki Thu: 12.15 n aspiring carloonist's them som assessed agent SPONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS [U] Thu: 12.45, 3.00pt THE MAGIC ROUNDABOUT [U] Thu: 12.30.2.30 Odeon Magdalen St (0871 2244 007) IDE AND SEEK [15] MEET THE FOCKERS [12A] Thu: 12.15, 3.00, 5.45, 8.30pt Barbara Streisland and Dustin Hoffman as aging hippies. Ozone Multiplex (0870 444 3030) IN GOOD COMPANY [PG] Thu: 2.00, 4.30, 6.50, 9.10 AURA'S STAR [U] Thu: 12.50, 2.45p MEET THE FOCKERS [12A] Thu: 5.25. 6.30. 8.00. 9.00 Ick heist seauch with Brad. George. Matt and friends. Thu: 1.40.3.50n RACING STRIPES [U] eel good family adventure from makers of Babe. RAY [15] Nonic of the late, great Ray Cha Thu: 8.30 SHALL WE DANCE [12A] Thu: 12.00, 2.20, 4.40, 7.00, 9.20 Thu: 6.00, 8.40p pad trip. %. IDEWAYS [15] PONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS [U] nimation about a sponge. It's big in the U.S. Thu: 1.30, 3.30p THE AVIATOR [12A] Nanic of Howard Hunters with Leanards Di Cara Thu: 2.30.8.15 Thu: 1.10, 3.00, 4.50 /ERA DRAKE [15] Thu: 12.00. 5.45 = review on www.dailvinfo.co.uk

Although light-hearted, the play is rather ambitious; the events it chronicles unfold (back-wards) over the course of ten years, with the characters regressing from age 27 to age 17. Here the piece may overstretch itself a little. The scenes seem a little too spread out, and the gaps leave a lot of questions unanswered (when dees Sam go to Oxford? When dees Oil become a novelist?). Similarly, although the yahe leave a novelist?). Similarly, although the yahe leave well drawn in general, they don't regults chance the truth wer the they don't really change that much over the ten years the play covers; although they go from tee-shirts to tuxedos, the characters still basically talk the same and act the same at seventeen and twenty-seven. Although events ostensibly take place over the course of ten years, they often feel more like they take place over ten months.

According to the writer's notes, this is a play about the lies we tell when we are in love. According to the director's notes, it is a coming of age story. I am not entirely sure I agree with either of them. I did not come away from the play feeling that deceit was a particularly strong theme, or that the characters had really been through any kind of rite of passage. The strength of the play is that it's an entertaining story about engaging characters. It is a well written play, with some strong scenes,

decent characters and nice dialogue. It won't change your life, but it doesn't claim that it will (ind ed, the writer's notes explicitly say that it won't). This is a new play, by a new writer, and as

This is a new play, by a new writer, and as such is a reasonably strong debut. It is not without its flaws, but it is essentially an enjoyable evening's entertainment, and it doesn't really pretend to be anything else.

Daniel Hemmens, 22.02.05



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**GRACELAND** by Aled Roberts

## Burton Taylor Theatre, 9.30pm daily until Sat 26th Feb

It is difficult to know what to make of Graceland. Its static reflectiveness makes it vaguely reminis-It is difficult to know what to make of *Graceland*. Its static reflectiveness makes it vaguely remnins-cent of Pinter, but misus the intensity and pulso los of wit. The play is part of the Oxford University New Writing Festival, and whilst it definitely has the potential to be a successful play, that potential doesn't appear to have been fully realised. The action takes place in a factory canteen South Wales, where we are offered a glimpse into the lives of a group of workers as they indulge in the brief breaks which punctuate their tedious day's work. We are presented with a good mixture of character types, but, unfortunately, never properly introduced to any of them, which makes the play seem disappoint-ingly inconsequential.

The author's desired tone of contemplative monotony was well captured in Nanw Rowland's produc The autor's desired one of contemplative monotomy was were captured in namin Rowania S produc-tion, but there appeared to be very little behind the faque; the long pregnant silences weren't all that pregnant, and this, combined with a lack of expressed insight into the characters' minds, made the characterisation rather empty. When I go to the theatre, I expect drama – a label: tacit drama, bubbling away under the surface – but this play had very little. The dramatic potential was there, but remained insufficiently explored. I was rather disappointed when the play came to an abrupt end, before it had properly developed, and was keen to be offered a proper chance to discover more about the multitude of characters who never really had the chance to open up.

There were clever directorial touches, such as the spotlight on the clock between each scene to under-There were crever unrectional touches, such as the spounght on the clock or were reach scene to under-line the dragging presence of time; however this did also serve as a reminder that the real clock was ticking away and we were running out of time for some powerful drama to leap out and engage my emotions. The space was well-considered and the director had produced a pleasing sense of balance. The acting was very competent, and was only detracted from by the evident challenge of performing in the Welsh dialect in which the play is written. Although certain members of the cast had a pretty firm grip on the accent, many of them seemed uncomfortable as they spoke, and this produced an air of insincerity in certain cases and incomprehensibility in others, which was a tad frustrating. I found of insincerity in certain cases and incomprehensibility in others, which was a tad frustrating. I found myself forced to concentrate with all my might, for far of missing out on any quality punch lines, since from a comedic point of view the play is extremely successful. Although the author's rather anecdotal style may lack depth, this does not prevent if from provoking amusement; there were plenty of beautifully light one-liners and some sublime and well-directed moments of situational comedy. It's just a shame the characterisation wasn't as probing.

I'd recommend Graceland out of intrigue, if nothing else. Go along and settle your curiosity – you'll have a good laugh while you're at it and join in with the New Writing Festival spirit! Holly Dickens, 22.02.05

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#### **MEETINGS / LECTURES**

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in De SIECLE SEMINAR SERIES / "The Role of the in de Siecle Print Censorship Debates" / Oxford Engli pm / Free / anna.vaninskaya@hertford.ox.ac.uk / ww w.ac.uk/seminary/fin.html / Meyerstein Room (11)

eminars/hn.ntm / newsen Manor Road /ASHING' SEMINAR SERIES / Andrew : Political Campaigning and its Effectivene rary Ideology Forum / 6.30pm / Free / AII We (ksongibrookes.ac.uk / http://sbl.brookes. ents/politics-ir/newsitems/ideologyforum.htm

dord brookes University, Gypsy Lane Campus, IALOGUE AND UNDERSTANDING / Lecture, H -Faisal, Saudi Minister of Foreign Affairs / Entry am Schools, High St., Spm / academic.secreta tp://www.oxcis.ac.uk / Examination Schools H ry free by ticket mp://www.oxcis.ac.uk / Examination Schools, High St **DXFORD STUNT FACTORY** / Gravity & Extreme Sports club a Dxford & Brookes / 7pm / enquiries⊛oxfordstuntfactorv.com

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/ Society for Graduates / Visitors welcome / 8pm / £1.50 non members / Okinaga Room, Wadham College, Parks Road THE UNCEASING QUEST / Retrospective of the search fo higher meaning Zen, Yoga, Kabala, Buddha and Quantum physics.../19:30/ £5/£2 / uncessing@rthworld.com/Yenue TBA

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can happily report that it's wonderful." Eillen Kent has produced and directed the Chisinau Mainoau Ballet from Moldowa mavelloasity. The danc-flowing movements and ponder just how skilled and strong the performers must be to balance, jump, skip, carry and bend in the way they do. The leading east members stand ball to a terrific elimax. The wide/da first Caraboses provide the strong the standard strong the strong the faster, and the direction allows the set pieces to build and shift to a terrific elimax. The wide/da first Caraboses provide the strong the strong the strong the strong the parameters and tryic do make the hos brives. Board Caraboses, the woman sitting next to me tutted in disgust. I's not a paratorning, "she compliande. Well no. hos wo "It's not a pantomime," she complained. Well, no, but we still feel the same way about the wicked fairy!

The Tchaikovsky score is excellently performed by the orchestra, and the sound quality in the New Theatre is excellent. The violin solo by Igor Ersac is a particular highlight, delicate and powerful.

usgmigni, cencate and powerful. I was taken aback also by how many people are involv-– not only are there the lead dancers, there are also it troupe of dancers with smaller parts. Then there's it orchestra and conductor. And there must be countle tagehands and technical support staff, as well as costur iers for the amazing, claborate costumes. This scale alo is enough to impress. is enougn to impress. Why first ballet experience, then? A revelation. I had partly expected it all to be a little proposterous and inaccessible, but the reality was very different. Slopping Beauty was a warming cockail of skill, strength, posise, grace, and music that should kengt anyone in from the snowy streets of Oxford this week. If you can't make it to Sleeping Beauty before Wendeady, Swan Lake, which should share its quality execution and production values, is on from Thursday until Statuday. Andy Cottereus

Andy Cotgreave

BALLET REVIEW Sleeping Beauty New Theatre, 21st - 23rd Feb 2005 New Theatre, 21st – 23rd Feb 2005 Tev reached the age of binity-three and have to say that Tchaikovsky's Skeping Beauty, at the New Theatre until Wednesday, is my first blatt. L carl therefore base my review on the technical skills of the dancers, or how it compares to other performances. Te fail an only provide a ballet virgin's opinions and hope two things. If you too have never been, maybe I can inspire you. If you're an of hand, then I hope my naive musings at least portray the quality of the performance. The fairs thing is batt the princed, fail, — when I as result, spire is used by functioner prince). The iow of the envertines of the exercision and I.