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Next issue : Fri 31st October Deadline: 10am, Thu 30th October

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Issue No. 7443

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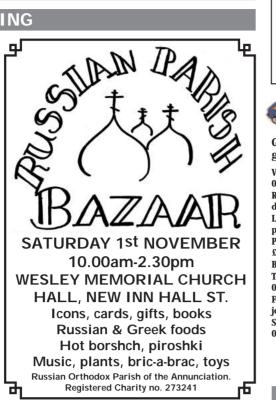
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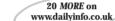
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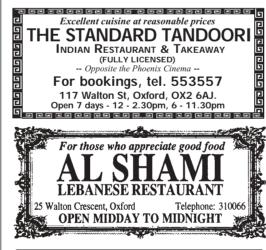
above right Oxford Playhouse 305305 HUMBLE BOY Mon 27 - Sat Mon - Wed: 7.30 Thu & Sat: 2.30, 7.30 Fri: 8.00 former bunny girl and her astrophysicist son £13-£24.50. Review at www.dailyinfo.co.uk

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7.30pm "A visceral, raw and hilarious tale of lust, despair and Internet sex". Review above right

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Despite a hypnotic plot and a fast pace, The Country wasn't outstanding. But as an entertaining mystery about infidelity, passion and lies, it wasn't all bad either.

The Country, by Martin Crimp, is acted out by three characters; the neurotic Corinne (Aoife Stone), her squeaky-clean doctor husband, Richard (James Profumo) and a beautiful young woman called Rebecca (Lily Sykes), whom he finds unconscious by the side of the road as he returns from a house call. Or so we are led to believe as the play opens.

For this is a play of twisted meanings and deception; the characters meld seamlessly through many different states, forcing you to side first with one, then another as more of the sordid details come to light.

The play motors along, driven by an effective, if fairly cliched plot, the mundanity of which is saved mainly by the deft characterisation by the

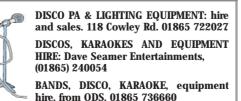
THEATRE REVIEW

CLOSER by Patrick Marber Burton Taylor Theatre until Sat 1st

This is a play for anyone who has ever been in love and messed it up. It's a dark and witty exploration of desire, despair and the strange, tortuous dance of human relationships. There is something sickeningly familiar in the characters' semi-comic, semi-tragic quests for intimacy that, inevitably, end in violence, destruction and greater loneliness. Yet, despite the bleakness of Marber's vision, this is a sensitive, compelling and, often, very, very funny production that manages to capture both the shocking ugliness of raw emotion and the formal elegance of an exquisitely structured and balanced play.

Perhaps a warning is in order: this play may not be for everyone, for, although absolutely riveting, it is does not make for easy viewing. Closer touches on the darkest aspects of love, desire, sex, jealousy and guilt and does not flinch from them, saved only from absolute desolation by the quick-fire repartee of its characters. The famous (or, perhaps, notorious) cybersex scene, between the credulous Larry (Andrew Mortimer) and the cruelly playful Dan (Anthony Wilks), is simply hilarious. There are innumerable reasons to see this play - but that scene must be close to the top of the list.

BANDS, DISCOS, LIGHTS



actors. All three characters continually walk the "I was looking at." "Yes?" "The trees. I was looking twilight zone between many opposing states; they tread the grey area between being the strong one or the weak, the good one or the bad, the victim or the manipulator, always leaving just enough doubt for the next twist of plot to be utterly believable, and indeed, in retrospect, clear to anyone who had been looking for it.

THEATRE REVIEW

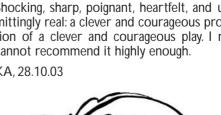
The Country by Martin Crimp - Old Fire Station Theatre until Sat 1st

In fact, the acting was generally good, with only the occasional disappointment. Lily Sykes couldn't be faulted, and even managed to cope with a fast-igniting handbag into which a cigarette stub had been nonchalantly thrown minutes earlier (which just goes to show smoking really can kill you). However, in the opening scene in particular, Aoife Stone seemed to be nervous, and appeared to try and counter this by overacting. This wasn't entirely her fault, as a lot of her dialogue was quite Pinteresque, running along the lines of, "What are you looking

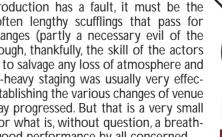
Flawlessly directed by Andrew Mortimer and Anthony Wilks (who also offer excellent performances as the two male leads), this is a superb piece of ensemble theatre that maintains its integrity and intensity throughout. Olivia Grant, as the graceful and sophisticated Anna, is positively luminous and Jessie Burton, struggling only occasionally (and not jarringly) with her Cockney accent, provides just the right counterpoint of waif-like vulnerability and street-wise allure. Individually they are al exceptionally talented, but more striking yet is the chemistry between the four of them, which infuses the whole performance with an energy and reality that brings out the very best of Marber's play.

If this production has a fault, it must be the frantic, often lengthy scufflings that pass for scene changes (partly a necessary evil of the BT), although, thankfully, the skill of the actors managed to salvage any loss of atmosphere and the prop-heavy staging was usually very effective in establishing the various changes of venue as the play progressed. But that is a very small quibble for what is, without question, a breathtakingly good performance by all concerned.

Shocking, sharp, poignant, heartfelt, and unremittingly real: a clever and courageous production of a clever and courageous play. I really



cannot recommend it highly enough. KA, 28.10.03



PA Consulting Group is holding a compar presentation on Thursday 30 October 2003, 6pm, Ashmolean Museum, Headley Lecture Theatre. The presentation will provide essential information on careers at PA and there will also be a chance to have an informal chat to PA representatives over drinks and nibbles. For further information www.paconsulting.com

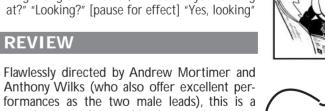
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