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REVIEWS



Rob Nagle and Colin Bates in *The Judas Kiss* by David Hare at Boston Court Pasadena. (Photo by Jenny Graham)

The Judas Kiss

Reviewed by Terry Morgan
Boston Court Pasadena
Through March 24

RECOMMENDED

The human desire for love is one of the main glues that holds the world together — along, of course, with greed, the lust for power and chocolate. Without love, there would be no rom-coms, no Valentine's Day industry, and significantly less adorable tots bopping about. Love, we are told, is the central meaning of life, the source of happiness and true fulfillment. The flip side of this philosophy,

however, is that loving the wrong person or existing in a time where your sort of love is considered wrong, can destroy a life. Oscar Wilde, unfortunately, is a case study in both. His tragic story is compellingly told in David Hare's *The Judas Kiss*, which receives a strong, well-acted production at Boston Court Pasadena.

In April 1895, playwright Wilde (Rob Nagle) has an important choice to make, one that will assuredly change the rest of his life. He's about to be arrested for "gross indecency" for his romantic relationship with Lord Alfred "Bosie" Douglas (Colin Bates) — but he has a short period of time to decide whether he'll stay to face the charges or flee the country. As he deliberates in a London hotel, his friend Robert (Darius De La Cruz) begs him to leave — even the court is giving him ample time to escape. But Bosie, more interested in defying his homophobic father than in Wilde's life and reputation, wants to him to stay. As the afternoon passes, Wilde has to decide exactly how much he's willing to sacrifice for love.

As Wilde, Nagle is superb, in a performance filled with subtlety, dry wit and emotion that cannot quite be restrained. He's great at portraying small, human details (how Wilde is more moved to tip the hotel staff than to think about self-preservation), and equally strong in big, passionate speeches, as when he defends his right to make what seems a disastrously bad decision. I've enjoyed Nagle's work for years now, and was amazed to realize that, at some point in this production, I was no longer seeing this actor at all but only seeing Wilde. It's a terrific portrayal, and one of Nagle's best.

Bates is excellent as Bosie. This character is usually played as a cad, but Bates gets beneath Bosie's arrogance and uninformed selfishness to uncover a real love, which makes Oscar's sacrifice seem more understandable, if still ill-advised. De La Cruz is very good as Robert, the much-abused voice of reason, and plays the effort to get Oscar to save himself with believable desperation. Will Dixon does nice work as hotel manager Moffatt, particularly in a speech where he compliments Wilde for being a true gentleman, and he receives lively support from Matthew Campbell Dowling and Mara Klein as loyal hotel employees.

Director Michael Michetti gets great work from his ensemble, and his direction serves the play well, although visually things are a bit spare. Designer Se Hyun Oh's set in Act One credibly replicates the atmosphere of a posh hotel, but the white screen in place of a backdrop in Act Two feels less effective.

Hare's play is an incisive character study and features some lovely writing; it's especially interesting in that it's sympathetic to Wilde's choice, or at least to his right to make it. My one cavil is that the play itself is sometimes talky and repetitive and might work better with some pruning. But overall this is a smart, moving production which gives the complexities of this historical tragedy their due. If this story intrigues you, I'd encourage you to check it out.

Boston Court Pasadena, 70 N. Mentor Ave., Pasadena; Thurs.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 2 p.m.; through Mar. 24. www.BostonCourtPasadena.org. Running time: approximately two hours and forty minutes.