

The Stage Struck Review

by Frances Baum Nicholson



Watching the Mighty Fall: “The Judas Kiss” at Boston Court



Rob Nagle as Oscar Wilde and Colin Bates as the source of his downfall, Lord Alfred Douglas, in “The Judas Kiss” at Boston Court Pasadena [photo: Jenny Graham]

One of the tragic tales to come from the criminalization of homosexuality in Britain has always been the story of Oscar Wilde, the celebrated, flamboyant author and playwright whose great fame turned into great scandal, imprisonment, and self-imposed exile. Modern playwrights have examined this to highlight historic injustices, make comparisons with the intolerance of modern nations, and even to highlight the double standards of the Victorian Era. David Hare’s “The Judas Kiss” takes a different tack.

Now at Boston Court Pasadena, Hare’s play looks instead at Wilde and the man whose relationship with him caused his downfall: Lord Alfred Douglas, son of the Marquis of Queensbury, commonly called “Bosie.” The petulant and self-absorbed Bosie’s hold over the older Wilde, pushing him (among other things) to try to sue the Marquis for libel and thus to open himself to prosecution for homosexuality, becomes a framework with which to study how relationships can turn manipulative and eventually destructive to the person manipulated.

There seems ample evidence for Bosie’s petulance and opportunism. Most certainly, the destructive effect on Wilde’s life and fortunes is undeniable. What Hare’s play does, however, is look at how this manipulation worked. Bosie pushes Wilde one way, Wilde’s friend and former lover (and eventual executor of his literary estate) Robert Ross tries to reason him into another, and Wilde makes disastrous decisions in the name of love.

Rob Nagle gives Wilde the right combination of flamboyance and deep insecurity, ready to lean on a young man who never has an interest at heart except his own. Even with the elaborate language and gesture, this is a romantic caught in that time-old trap of allowing blind love to push him away from those who actually have his best interests at heart. As Bosie, Colin Bates radiates immaturity, self-obsession, and obliviousness as he drags Wilde to shame and bankruptcy.

Darius De La Cruz makes a worried, earnest and frustrated friend as Robert Ross, giving a gravitas to the disaster his character is trying to help his former lover avoid. Matthew Campbell Dowling, Maria Klein and Kurt Kanazawa provide a backdrop of lasciviousness which was the secret underpinning of Victorian society, as does Will Dixon as the hotel manager busy keeping his clients’ secrets.

Director Michael Michetti has kept the production spare, allowing the larger-than-life Wilde a central place, seeming increasingly pure and victimized as all around him exude a

sensuality he seems to have eschewed for what he sees as a more spiritual connection. That contrast alone says a great deal about what set him up for disaster.

Se Hyun Oh's set hints at both opulence and penury consecutively, and Dianne K. Graebner's costumes give color to these colorful lives. Still, the net result is a fine writer's ruin. To see in that antique echoes writ large of modern romantic disasters is a point of the play all its own.

The play includes nudity and sexual situations, and is recommended for children and adults 17 years old and up. Children under 13 will not be admitted.

What: "The Judas Kiss" When: through March 24, 8 p.m. Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, 2 p.m. Sundays, with an added performance at 8 p.m. Monday, March 18. Where: Boston Court Pasadena, 70 N. Mentor Ave. in Pasadena. How Much: \$39 adult, \$34 senior, \$20 student Info: <http://www.bostoncourtpasadena.org> or 626-683-6801