

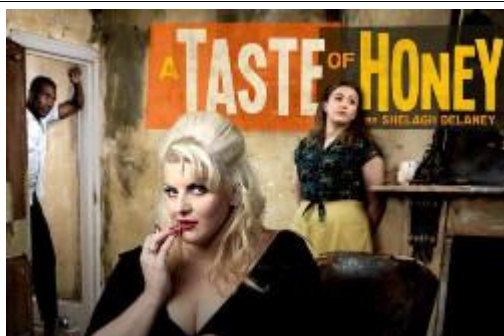
Theatre Visits – January 2020 – 2022



Here is a record of the iU3A Theatre Visits group visits from 2020 through the Covid pandemic period. For more recent visits and future plans, go to our [web page](#)

2020

January



The **January** theatre visit was to see a welcome revival of Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey*, with an interesting range of characters brought to the stage. The central focus is on the relationship between the mother and daughter. The mother, Helen, found her caring role difficult. Had she found that her mother similarly did not provide her with a strong caring role model? In fact the caring role was supplied by the gay man, a part which is still unusual on the stage. Someone in our discussion

group said that the male characters were not developed, but I think the character of Geoff could have developed after the play ends, so giving us food for thought after we have seen the play. Is he able to assert himself and go back into the life of daughter Jo and her baby? Given that Helen, the mother, is a 'flaky' character, it is likely that after she disappears from the scene again, her responsibilities to Jo and the baby breaking down, Geoff will have a chance to step in.

Perhaps the greatest achievement of Delaney is the unsentimental view of working-class people that she gives us. In spite of very tough conditions they are able to laugh and see the funny side of their circumstances; this gives them a dignity, particularly Helen. When she says 'I certainly supervised my own downfall', we see agency and irony, which is there again when Jo says 'why marry your husband?' and Helen replies 'At the time I had nothing better to do'. The usual reasons for marrying take a back seat. Helen is able to reflect upon herself when she says 'The extent of my credulity always depends on my alcoholic intake.' We see another innovative ability of Delaney when Jo is attracted to the black boyfriend. At this stage in the play there is no focus on race, but the focus is on what he does and what he has done in the past. There is no mention of skin colour, just his brown eyes and curly hair. This is a refreshing take on 'inter-racial' relations, which is only addressed when Helen is horrified with the idea of a black grandchild and what the neighbours will say.

In our discussion people felt that the vulnerability of Jo and Geoff was not conveyed by the actors in this stage production and that the film adaptation showed this more successfully — a fair point, although the anger of Jo is given appropriate voice. People also remarked on the jazz that was very much part of the staging: they felt

this broke up the tension that was experienced by the mother/daughter relationship: true, but I would have preferred the jazz group to have been staged so that they were part of the background, rather than on the stage as if they were part of the audience. I noticed that at times the jazz players were not finding it amusing, when I was amused by what was being said. Here we have the problem of not being able to suspend disbelief.

Jeanette Winterson helps to explain why Delaney failed to become a successful playwright, in spite of her initial success at 19. She did not have the easy 'entrée' into 'artistic male bonding' enjoyed by male playwrights, who were able to exchange ideas with fellow writers, directors and theatre critics. Although Delaney was helped by Joan Littlewood, her ability to become part of a writers' group was not realised. As Winterson says: 'Joan Littlewood did her best to help but she couldn't give Shelagh what gender and class made impossible: a community of equals'. (Susan Caffrey)

February

The **February** visit was to Park Theatre to see the first English version of the 1970s' *La Cage aux Folles* [The Play], by Jean Poiret, translated by Simon Callow. It was great on a miserable grey wet afternoon in North London to find ourselves on the French Riviera in the middle of a classic French farce. The action takes place in a glorious sea-view apartment above the drag club 'La Cage aux Folles' when chaos ensues after Laurent, the rather conventional son of Georges, the owner, and Georges's male partner Albin (Madame Zaza, the star of the cabaret) announces that his fiancée and her ultra right-wing Christian parents are coming to visit. He insists that all evidence of their flamboyant lifestyle be removed and in the second Act we see that the flat has been turned into something resembling a monastery with crucifixes and portraits of clerical figures — though the crockery depicting erotic ancient Greek scenes somehow gets past Laurent's notice and causes much puzzlement to the visitors round the dining table. As in all farces, there are endless complications and confusions but eventually all ends well.



March



The **March 2020** visit was to see *Leopoldstadt*, by Tom Stoppard, which is set in Vienna and opens on a happy scene of Christmas celebration. It is 1899. The family are decorating the Tree. There is much talk between the various groups, revealing that this is a professional, secular Jewish family, at peace with themselves and one another. As the play progresses towards World Wars One and then Two, we see the horrors that awaited Jewish families at the hands of the Nazis. The Stoppard wit is constantly present, though, lighting up the action and the dialogue. The actors present the play superbly, and the sets quietly support the changing story.

Leopoldstadt is based on the playwright's own life. His mother had escaped the Nazis, bringing young Tom to England, where she remarried, saying merely that there was some Jewish blood in the family. In his fifties Stoppard was contacted by an unknown Czech cousin, who told him their story, including the fate of many of them in death camps.

Tom Stoppard says this may be his last play. What a privilege to have seen it. (Jan Whelan)

April

The Covid19 pandemic interrupted our regular theatre trips.

2021

At the end of **June 2021** members of the Theatre Group went to Regent's Park Open Air Theatre to see 'Romeo and Juliet'. It was not the best production I have ever seen but it was great to go back to a theatre again, after a gap of more than 15 months, and to chat to a few members, old and new, over lunch and cups of tea. We were greeted by the set, which looked as if Verona had suffered some catastrophe, the stage littered with rocks and bricks with a great chasm running across it — later I thought that perhaps this was to demonstrate the enmity between the houses of Capulet and Montague? It was played at a breakneck speed with no interval, so the period from Romeo and Juliet first meeting to their ending their lives in the Capulet family crypt seemed more chaotic than ever.



I don't think the group will be getting back to regular monthly visits for a little while, but our next visit will again be in the open air in September when we will be going to Regent's Park to see 'Carousel'. (Sue Welsford)

2022

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