

# Don't Look Now

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Tim Walker  
THEATRE

Treats  
★★★★☆  
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★★★★☆



ON THE FACE OF IT, THERE IS SOMETHING faintly ludicrous about the idea of turning **Don't Look Now** into a play. It's almost up there with making a film of *Cats*, which was posited in John Guare's *Six Degrees of Separation*. For a start, how on earth do you capture the majesty of Venice on a stage, or, for that matter, the supernatural undertones of Daphne du Maurier's short story? And then, of course, there's the indelible impression left by Nicolas Roeg's 1973 film version and that famous sex scene between Julie Christie and Donald Sutherland which allegedly required little, if any, acting...

Let me say simply that the stab that Lucy Bailey makes of it at the Lyric, **Hammersmith**, is every bit as determined and effective as that of du Maurier's scarlet-anoraked, vertically challenged villain. Ms Bailey, the director (and 'conceiver', so the programme tells us) of this Sheffield Theatres production, evokes Venice convincingly enough. The sound and lighting design (among other effects, ripples of water projected above the stage) see to that. The supernatural undertones are conveyed by some mesmerising performances from Joanna McCallum and Susan Wooldridge as the sinister sisters who haunt John and Laura's ill-starred holiday to the city of water.

It begins cosily enough with John (Simon Paisley Day) and Laura (Susie Trayling) looking very much like an archetypal middle-class British couple on holiday. His exasperation with the Italian waiter and her attempts to placate him were played with a wonderful lightness of touch. The two sisters are dining in the same restaurant. At first John jokes about them to his wife – perhaps they are two master criminals in drag, he says, *sotto voce* – but, as the revolving set makes it look as if their table is drawing closer and closer, they make him feel increasingly uncomfortable.

One of the sisters (Ms Wooldridge) appears to be staring intently at him. It turns out that she is blind and, when she has a chance to talk to Laura in the ladies' room, reveals that she is psychic as well. What is more, she feels the presence of Christine, John and Laura's daughter who died recently from meningitis.

What unfolds is, to say the least, improbable, but Ms Bailey, with her adapter Nell Leyshon and a cast who play it all with total conviction, allows us all to suspend disbelief for two-and-a-half hours, and the denouement is played out with grizzly relish. If there is a disappointment, it's the

sex scene. The vogue on the London stage these days is for full-frontal nudity, but Mr Day and Ms Trayling performed their moment of passion with a degree of coyness that would have passed muster in the 1950s. In every other respect, however, this immensely stylish production exceeded expectations, and even, on occasions, made this critic jump.

'Treats', Garrick Theatre, London WC2 (0870 890 1104) to 26 May. 'Don't Look Now', Lyric **Hammersmith**, London W6 (0870 050 0511) to 31 March