

Time Out October 17-24 www.timeout.com

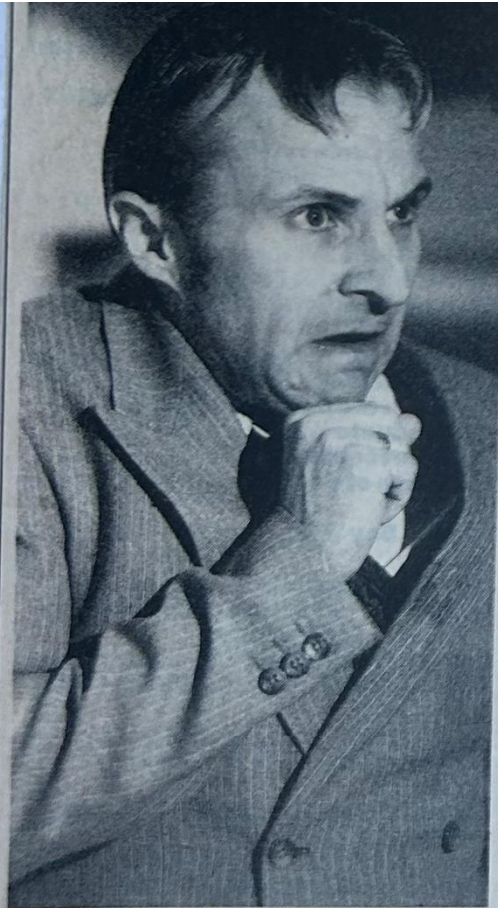
'Life with an Idiot'

The Gate O-WE

There is a perfect, skewed logic to Victor Erofeyev's tale of challenged sanity which becomes progressively hard to read in this exuberant, terribly clever stage adaptation. 'I' has committed an offence against the state and as his punishment he must welcome an idiot into his home. He goes in search of a holy fool, a Shakespearean wise idiot from whom he might learn the truth of life. But Vova is a thoroughly modern madman, more concerned with piss, shit and semen than opaque political witticisms. Soon his disregard for the warp and weft of social convention begins to pull at Masha, I's wife, and her distaste melts into adoration. I inevitably follows suit and, as the walls of their own sanity come tumbling down, a discomforting triangle of emotions emerges.

Director Ben Harrison has bravely attempted to translate the literary challenge of Erofeyev's prose into a theatrical one. The audience sit, ringside, in the front room of I and Masha's house, where the blood, piss and shit are excessively splattered all over Fred Meller's beautiful, minimalist set. But, despite some well choreographed physical performances, and a score of winning, surreal theatrical touches (who would have thought the inside of a jam doughnut could so perfectly resemble a vagina?) Harrison's gamble doesn't quite pay off. Particularly in the opening half of the play, there is much surprising, effective comedy and impressive acting from Rufus Wright as Petrov, Tea Alagic as Masha and Fergus McLarnon as Vova. But, overwhelmingly, there is an alienating lack of humility in the company's ethos. 'Life with an Idiot' suffers badly from its own excesses, and increasingly, from a chronic self-indulgence that is hard to see beyond.

Lucy Powell



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