

# Reviews

## And Women Must Weep

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing

Greenwich Studio Theatre

9<sup>th</sup> February 1994 – 13<sup>th</sup> March 1994

Translated by Margarete Forsyth

Directed by Margarete Forsyth &  
Jonathan Banatvala

# The Stage

28<sup>th</sup> April 1994

## GREENWICH STUDIO THEATRE **And Women Must Weep**

A PRODUCTION that incorporates a cycle of four plays by Arthur Schnitzler, developing similar themes, but each act distinct in its own way, is quite a tall order, but *And Women Must Weep* never fails to live up to the task.

All four plays – three short scenes and a lengthier fourth – all deal with the role of women at the turn of the century. Some of the women are weaker than others, restricted by their circumstances.

Others have the strength to turn their backs on the men who treat them disparagingly. But what makes the evening so successful are the numerous moments when an audience, particularly the female contingent, can still recognise and empathise with many years later.

Half Past One is the perfect beginning – it's lighthearted, and involves probably one of the weakest women of the evening, finely portrayed by Sonia Abercrombie.

Her gripe is that her lover always leaves at the same time every day so he can go home and get some sleep,

which she finds infuriating. The act's humour, mixed in with the couple's very petty arguments and silly comments, is irresistible.

The *Hysterical Woman* is a sadly ironic title for the second play, for the woman in question is not hysterical but pregnant by her lover, whom she adores.

The man's dreadful arrogance and insincere reaction to her plight is perfectly played by Alex McSweeney.

The hypocritical attitudes that existed towards women who had any kind of sexual experience before marriage are looked at more deeply in *Comforting Myths*. Fedor (Steven Elder), giving probably the most impressive performance of the night, is a confused and tormented man, for despite the strength of his love for Anna (Nina Jacques), he cannot accept the humiliation connected with her previous sexual experience.

The fourth piece concerns itself with *Literary Matters*, and the need for women to be allowed to express themselves intellectually.

*And Women Must Weep's* one location, a Viennese boarding house, is extremely well staged and beautifully lit, and there is never a flawed characterisation or touch of sadness or comedy handled without subtlety.

Directors Margarete Forsyth and Jonathan Banatvala do a great job, as does a brilliant cast. A delight to watch.

**Lisa Martland**

# The Times

16<sup>th</sup> February 1994

THIS enterprising theatre, above the Prince of Orange pub at Greenwich station, looks set on a course that could make it southeast London's answer to Notting Hill's Gaie: resourceful staging in a small space, strong acting, and a concern to revive or introduce European rarities.

Lessing, Holberg, Schnitzler and, next month, Diderot's *The Nun* make a rich opening programme, with the first three cunningly combining social insight with comedy. For this reason the over-all title that Margaret Forsyth gives her translations of four Schnitzler plays promises a more sombre view of sexual relationships than the evening actually delivers.

All four are set in identical rooms in a Viennese boarding house. The first, *Half Past One*, shows a lovable woman unwilling to let her lover leave: it is the merest sketch and the tone is very light. Deeper matters intrude in *The Hysterical Woman*, where Philippa Cameron's grave wife will have to allow her husband to make love to her again because her lover has made her pregnant. Cause for weeping here, I suppose, and the lover (Alex McSweeney) is insensitive enough to open champagne as their talk touches on abortion, but only pours a glass for himself.

## THEATRE

### Obscure delights

And Women  
Must Weep  
Greenwich Studio

The longest piece is *Comforting Myths*, where Schnitzler presents a broader section of society as setting for a tortuous affair between Fedor and Anna, an actress on the eve of her first success. After publicly declaring that men should not hold a woman's youthful indiscretions against her, Fedor finds himself eaten up with jealousy and doubts. To be caught up in the situation we need to be shown qualities in him that Anna credibly loves, but Steven Elder's suitably anguished performance leaves little room for this and Nina Jacques is only given the chance

to display her character's demure and puzzled side.

The treat of the evening is *Literary Matters*, where a young poetess confesses to her fiancé — not just a gentleman jockey but a titled jockey — that she has written a novel about love. To her dismay, a former lover arrives from Munich, bringing the novel he has written about her. Each of them had included all the love letters that passed between them. "How dare you?" she breathes, stepping aside for another gasp at the cigarette she has concealed in the bureau.

Schnitzler is not denying that their feelings could have been genuine, even when the lover discovers that "I write in impassioned haste" was copied from a carefully phrased first draft. But this is a society where emotions are to be arranged, if not before, then afterwards. The playing is delightful: Nigel Carrington's blithely superior fiancé, Donna Wilson's crisp defence of her self-esteem, and Julian Forsyth equally confident as the wild man of Munich. The directors are Margaret Forsyth and Jonathan Banatvala, and I look forward to seeing how GST develops in their hands.

JEREMY KINGSTON

# What's On

16<sup>th</sup> February 1994

## AND WOMEN MUST WEEP

— Greenwich Studio

The title of the Greenwich Studio Theatre's unmissable new season opener comes from a Charles Kingsley poem and is an apt choice for a production dealing with the theme of feminine desire and aspirations cut down to size by masculine-dominated society. But the rarely performed plays in this cycle of four are by Viennese writer Arthur Schnitzler, best known here for *La Ronde*. The evening opens with two short curtain-raisers, *Hall Past One* and *The Hysterical Woman*, which are followed by the longer *Literary Matters* in a programme that culminates in an absolutely riveting hour-long abridged version of the full-length *Das Marchen*, translated here as *Comforting Myths*.

Each play is set in the same room: a turn-of-the-century Viennese boarding house, lovingly evoked by director Margarete Forsyth with the aid of some superb low-key lighting. A clock ticks on the mantelpiece, a maid sets a few props and lights a candle and long before the first play starts you feel as if you are a fly-on-the-third-wall peering in on the private comings and goings of Schnitzler's bourgeois protagonists.

There's a rather nasty sting at the end of each of the opening sketches in which two utterly selfish and completely cynical men use and abuse their lovers' genuine feelings for them. *Literary Matters*, however, is a much more complex study of a woman with literary pretensions, Margarete, who becomes completely torn between the promise of a conventional marriage to Klemens, a boorish womanising aristocrat, and expressing her true emotions through her writing. The tyrannical Klemens is jealous of her romantic past which she

has tried to capture in her first novel and is embarrassed by her creativity. But when her bohemian artist ex-lover Gilbert suddenly turns up he reveals that he has also fictionalised his version of their torrid affair in novel form. The situation turns to near farce when Margarete is forced to choose between her true feelings and Klemens' completely selfish double standards which he cloaks under a veil of forgiveness.

Finally, in *Comforting Myths* the idea of the fallen woman who must be punished and kept in her place is relentlessly deconstructed as convenient male myth. Young actress Anna is about to embark on what appears to be an ideal role, a woman with a 'past'. She is able to identify with the character because she has had an intense fling in her youth. Her current suitor Fedor, who seems to be a sincere advocate of feminism, turns out to be a cruel, vindictive monster who uses virtually every emotional blackmail trick in the book to get her to confess her sins and even sacrifice her budding career. Fortunately she finds the inner strength to send this appalling despot packing in an edge-of-the-seat scene which is of such intensity that you really want to cheer from the sidelines.

The writing may seem a touch melodramatic by our standards and the characters always verge on the two-dimensional, but the issue of a decaying society built on double-standards really does have resonance today. And the combination of Margarete Forsyth's finely judged production and electrifying performances from a cast who all manage to capture every nuance of this extraordinary piece of writing ensure that the audience not only has something to think about, but has a thoroughly good time as well. (See Fringe)

ROGER FOSS

# Time Out

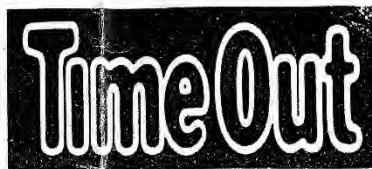
16<sup>th</sup> February 1994

## 'And Women Must Weep'

### GREENWICH STUDIO

Round up the usual suspects: once more Margarete Forsyth translates, co-directs (with Jonathan Banatvala) and even designs the excellently fussy set, while Julian Forsyth bungs in a few effortless cameos. Welcome back, too, to Sonia Abercrombie, Joan Walker and Donna Wilson, and Steven Elder, whose portrayal of Fedor, a hypocritical prig, couldn't be more different from his lithe Hamlet at the Studio last year.

This latest Germanic offering is a cycle of plays by Arthur Schnitzler, beginning with the sexist skit 'Half Past One' in which Abercrombie *en déshabille* torments her lover with a fine display of feminine illogicality; deepening with 'The Hysterical Woman', a cynical vignette about unfaithfulness and the more substantial 'Literary Matters', where Wilson and Forsyth form a classic male-female sparring duo as two self-obsessed writers each using the other for material.



**February 16-23**

So far the glum title rather belies the sparkling fare. But after the break comes a more sombre, thought-provoking piece, 'Comforting Myths'. Beautiful but fallen actress Anna (Andie MacDowell lookalike Nina Jacques) is seduced by the free-thinking Fedor, who professes scorn for conventional values but becomes obsessed with her sexual past. This central fraught relationship is set against a dizzy background of Viennese writers, rakes and bohemians, with Alex McSweeney excelling as a foolish aristocrat (rallying cry 'Long Live Modernism!'), not to mention wielding a champagne bottle with cheery élan. I'd like to know how many bottles of stage champagne Moët et Chandon donate to the London Fringe each year. *Suzi Feay*



# Mercury

17<sup>th</sup> March 1994

## A crying game

GREENWICH Studio Theatre, located over the Prince of Orange pub beside Greenwich Station, has just launched its second season of plays under the management of director Margarete Forsyth and her actor husband, Julian. And *Women Must Weep*, by Arthur Schnitzler, friend of Freud, is a polished production revealing what a raw deal women get in love.

Four playlets take place in late 19th century Vienna. The tone is set by the first, *Half Past One*. A woman protests when her lover prepares to go home at 1.30am to rest before work next day. He accuses her of being unreasonable. The punchline, coolly delivered after she asks if he loves her: "To distraction. Goodbye".

What is striking in these plays is how the women take their affairs more seriously than the men. In *The Hysterical Woman* a married mistress finds herself pregnant. Her lover can't believe she has been faithful and he is the father.

Another play deals with the problem of double standards. What becomes clear is, the problem for men is not that a woman has 'a past' but that other men have been there before. The male ego just can't take comparisons!

The problems for women as shown in these plays are at issue. It is remarkable they were written 100 years ago and by a man.

● And *Women Must Weep* runs until Sunday.

**Harriet Smith**

# News Shopper

16<sup>th</sup> February 1994

## Politics of sex provide a goldmine

The Greenwich Studio Theatre has hit gold again, with a striking production of Schnitzler's play cycle, *And Women Must Weep*.

Fast becoming established as one of the best fringe theatres in London, the Studio's hallmarks of sparkling acting, fresh European comedies and lovingly-created sets guarantee a relaxed and enjoyable night out.

All four plays are set in a bourgeois living room in Vienna at the turn of the century. Men and women engage in their individual battles of the sexes as new artistic and literary ideas shake the approved thinking.

The opening play, *Half Past One*, is a short, slight cameo, as a man desperately tries to tear himself away from his lover's arms in the middle of the night.

Sonia Abercrombie is delightfully perverse as the blowsy woman, whilst Sean Gallagher's escaping suitor is a little stilted. But the play amuses, and leads into the other plays well.

The second piece, *The Hysterical Woman*, is much sharper. A woman tries to tell her appallingly conceited, blundering lover of her catastrophic pregnancy. Alex McSweeney is very funny as the callous, insensitive man, unable to understand motivations more complex

than his own.

Co-director Margaret Forsythe's translation of Schnitzler's text throws up some sharply amusing dialogue.

"Will you always love me?" asks the heroine, clinging to her lover's neck.

"You have no idea how fond of you I am," is his heartily-delivered but entirely inadequate response.

### Respectable

Literary Matters is the best of the three. Donna Wilson gives a fine performance as Margarete, the would-be poet who cannot turn her back on respectable society.

Nigel Carrington, playing her aristocratic intended, is gloriously pompous. The character of Margarete becomes more interesting, and complicated, when ex-lover Gilbert arrives, played by Julian Forsyth.

The cowardice on all sides unravels in twists and turns of the very funny plot.

The real meat of the evening, however, comes in the final, hour-long play after the interval.

Steven Elder gives a stunning performance as Fedor, tortured between his real love for the beautiful actress Anna, and his inability to accept her slightly murky past.

Nina Jacques, as Anna, allows the



Joan Walker and Mina Jacques in *Comfort*

character's courage and integrity to shine through her enchanting face and clouds of dark hair.

The scene between them when she tries to persuade him to forget the past and seize happiness is complex, tautly performed and entirely gripping, provoking a much-deserved round of applause from the audience.

The pace becomes a little hard to sustain after this climax, which gives a strong pointer to the outcome of the final, lengthy scene.

All the supporting characters play well, particularly Alex McSweeney as the clownish dandy August Witte and Nigel Carrington's restrained but sympathetic Leo.

This is a worthy addition to the repertoire of this talented young company, whose production *Erasmus Montanus* was voted one of the best shows of 1993 by Theatre Record.

For those who missed out last time, *Erasmus Montanus* is to be revived at the theatre from April 21 to May 13.

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# Westcombe News

16<sup>th</sup> February 1994

## GREENWICH STUDIO

Next to Greenwich Station, above the Prince of Orange pub, if you don't know Greenwich Studio, go quickly to discover a theatrical enterprise which deserves warm local support and is sure to attract increasing attention far beyond South East London. *News Shopper* has described it as fast becoming established as one of the best fringe theatres in London. It is certainly one of the best appointed and most comfortable, with sophisticated sound and lighting installations.

Margarete and Julian Forsyth have tilled an unfamiliar repertoire of plays by major European writers, opening in autumn 1993 with comedies of the Enlightenment by Lessing (Minna von Barnholm) and Holberg (Erasmus). The current offering of four short plays ends with an abbreviated version of the first of Arthur Schnitzler's 80 full length plays, *Comforting Myths*, translated for its first English production here by Margarete Forsyth. Advanced idealistic thinking about liberation and equality is soon toppled by reversion to consuming jealousy when the freethinker is confronted with his own girlfriend's past indiscretions. A strong cast is headed by Steven Elder and Nina Jacques, with telling cameos from other members of the company, and this adroitly compressed adaptation of a long play is cleverly combined with three shorter pieces exploring the strains upon sexual role conventions in the Vienna of the turn of the century, all played out in the transient ambience of a boarding house, which allows for a moving final tableau in which all the heroine/victims are brought together.

*Literary Matters* had the piquant central notion of two former lovers who disclose to each other that both had written novels including all their love letters verbatim, each letter carefully drafted or copied before being despatched "in impassioned haste". Spontaneity compromised already, a century before the editing capabilities of modern word processors! All was revealed in a delightful trio by rival autobiographical novelists Julian Forsyth and Donna Wilson, with Nigel Carrington as her complacent fiance who resolved his embarrassment at her presumption by insisting upon consigning feminine creativity to ashes without the least compunction.

The setting and the costumes are a delight, with exemplary attention to detail, and your music critic would mention the perfect transitions, punctuated by Mendelssohn *Songs without Words* at exactly the right volume, and the directors' skill in ensuring that the actors project character and emotion in scale, without any overstatement even for those of us in the front row, right in that boarding house room amongst them all.

Tickets are a modest £6 (cones £4) for a magnificent evening's entertainment by actors, some with distinguished biographies, who are pleased to give their services gratis, as has to be the way in fringe theatre, to participate in the exploration of a rich vein of important neglected dramatic writing.

**Performances Tuesday to Sunday evenings,  
081-858 2862.**



# Blackheath & Greenwich Gazette

March 1994

## Rosemary Furber awards a star to the Greenwich Studio

A tousled chap emerges into another bookish set with glowing fire and curtains. He is disen-tangling from a luscious girl in a nightdress. He wants to get home before dawn so that he can muster some energy at work next day but she pouts and teases. She remarks shrewishly on his snoring, on how he is 'such an artist at sleeping'. It is the first of four short plays about men and women in *fin de siècle* Vienna, and about the sublimation of clever women's needs to mores dictated by dense, snobbish men.

Last time I watched that first scene, in that very place, it was performed under a glamorous coverlet of midnight blue with silver stars. That was two summers ago when Margarete Forsyth's translation was commissioned by the Greenwich Festival (it had money then). In that tiny venue above the pub at Greenwich railway station the full nudity was a touch embarrassing but effective. Now that Margarete and Julian Forsyth have taken over the Studio with plans to revive neglected European classics, they are doing the Schnitzler cycle again in the best possible taste.

There used to be five short plays – the weakest, about a middle aged woman recalling a life-changing affair has been dropped – and the four that remain are beautiful.

Best is *Literary Matters* about a woman who has opted out of artistic bohemian life for



Donna Wilson

a moneyed oaf who says things like "You mustn't think I feel superior to everyone who dresses badly." Her writer/lover reappears to give her a copy of his novel about their year of passionate love. To her embarrassment, it overlaps with her own writing, just published behind her fiancé's back. Both books replicate love letters they wrote with erotic urgency, the several drafts of which they both kept so that the world could appreciate their brilliance. The play is a very clever exposure of the clash between privacy and writers' vanity, and the performances by Julian Forsyth as the writer/lover and by Donna Wilson (who played the clever maid in their recent *Minna von Barnhelm*) are faultless. The husband (Nigel Carrington) is a gorgeous stuffed shirt. Carrington was the *Archers'* Nigel Pargeter for three years and looks exactly as he should.

This cycle of plays is highly recommended, for Schnitzler's writing, good translation and direction, and for improved comfort in the Studio's expanded auditorium into which you can take your drink. But why did Margarete Forsyth change the title from *Women of No Importance*?) Granted, the production is a new one and the content is slightly changed but she should have warned that it was basically a retread. The Greenwich theatre did not make that mistake with its terrific revival of *Schippel the Plumber*.

[Unknown]

16<sup>th</sup> February 1994

## Catch while you can ...



Agathe (Joan Waller) has seen it all before; her protege Anna (Nina Jacques) is still finding out. *And Women Must Weep* runs at the Greenwich Studio Theatre until March 13

The second season in the neglected European classics cycle at the GREENWICH STUDIO THEATRE has opened with predictable panache. *And Women Must Weep*, a quote from Charles Kingsley, is the title of a group of four playlets by Arthur Schnitzler, a friend and contemporary of Freud. Set in late 19th century Vienna, the plays illustrate the problems women face with their men. Surprisingly for the period, and particularly because the writer is a man, their predicaments are portrayed with remarkable insight.

What is striking in all the plays is how much more seriously the women take their affairs, and this is particularly illustrated by the second play *The Hysterical Woman* in which a married mistress finds herself pregnant. Her lover can't believe that she has been faithful to him and that he is therefore the father of the child: "Even in my wildest dreams, I never imagined you were telling the truth."

What becomes clear in this excellent piece of writing is that the problem for men is not the fact that a woman has "a past" but that other men have been there before and the male ego can't take the comparisons. Schnitzler's strength is that he conveys these points with humour and a lightness of touch and the lively dialogue, idiomatically translated by Margaret Forsyth, fairly speeds along. The GST's strength is its ability to bring out the subtlety of these plays and to do it in the warm mid-European sets we now expect of them. Expert touches make the Greenwich Studio productions a joy to review.