

# RAZZLE DAZZLE 'EM

**Marianka Swain** was thoroughly entertained by *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* at the Savoy Theatre on April 1

**T**he West End is awash with movies transformed into musicals or plays, some faring better than others – for every *Billy Elliot*, there is a *Fatal Attraction*.

The trick is finding source material that fits this medium, and the *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* team hit the jackpot. It's almost surprising this madcap tale wasn't born with a top hat and cane in its hand, ready to grapevine across a stage with equal parts flamboyance and sardonic postmodernism.

Two lovable rogues spend the summer in a French Riviera dreamscape, relieving bored heiresses of their fortunes with nothing more than a comedy accent and the odd well-placed prop. Robert Lindsay's seasoned swindler is challenged by Rufus Hound's uncouth Yank to a battle of cons, and so the narrative mash-up begins, nodding at *Pygmalion*, *Guys and Dolls* and *To Catch a Thief*, among others.

No matter – we're all in on the joke! Lindsay even quotes *Pygmalion*,

with a sly tilt of his head, in one of several meta moments. The referencing extends to David Yazbek's score, with strains of Cole Porter and chanson, and Jerry Mitchell's choreographic greatest hits: MGM musical formation work, with French maids and waiters slickly synchronised in their high kicks and turns; *Dirty Dancing* salsa; Fred 'n' Ginger foxtrot and waltz; and an all-out pastiche of *Oklahoma!*'s toe-tappin' hoedowns.

The actual story is secondary to the entertainment: look past the jazz hands and slapstick, and you'll find paper-thin characters and improbable plot twists. Nor does the show have much to say, beyond a vague sense that crime doesn't pay, but it sure is fun.

However, the game cast is clearly having a ball. Totally assured Lindsay is an utter joy, oozing oily charm through every soft-shoe shuffle, hat toss and even yodel. Jeffrey Lane's book skimps on emotional depth,

but Lindsay hints at the fatigue of juggling masks and living through performance, even as he demonstrates the thrill of the game; his gleefully sadistic shrink is a particular delight.

He has excellent comic chemistry with Hound, whose manic energy and physical commitment makes up for his average singing. Between them, they build the farce perfectly and relish every punchline.

As the wide-eyed mark, Katherine Kingsley is stuck playing straight man. She puts in a polished performance, but lacks dynamism.

Lizzy Connolly is far more memorable in her brief role as a gun-totin' redneck, pulling off impressive tricks and jump splits with aplomb.

Samantha Bond and John Marquez add much-needed heart in their romantic subplot, tentatively elegant in the ballroom numbers and wickedly funny in their post-coital exchanges.

It might not be original, but this is an old-fashioned treat. It would be a crime to miss it. ●



Robert Lindsay (centre) and Rufus Hound (centre below) star in *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*

