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# Selfie – bold portrait of the artistes as our ugly selves

The NYT's modern Dorian Grey is confident and insightful

**SELFIE**  
Ambassadors Theatre  
★★★★☆

The National Youth Theatre's confident modern take on *The Picture of Dorian Grey* proclaims that, in spite of different times, different mores, technical advances, humans have learned nothing since Oscar Wilde wrote the original. We are vain, greedy, and self-deluding – and the agents of our own downfall.

Congratulations, first of all, to the design team. They give a hint of Oscar Wilde's aestheticism with some beautiful projections (presumably by Verity Quinn and colleagues) onto gauze, which act as an interesting and disturbing contrast with the onstage set – a neglected London – as well as the tasteless extravagance of the costumes (by Teresa Pocas and Helena Bonner).

The most significant departure is that in this version Dorian Grey is a woman made famous by a touched-up photograph. Although at first incredulous and delighted by the picture, Dorian is at the same time aware that she is not the ideal beauty it represents. She almost deletes it but her vanity is tickled when she is flattered by sycophants who, of course, exploit her mercilessly.

Kate Kennedy performs with subtlety and depth as Dorian. A combination of insecurity and over-confidence, she is at first an ordinary young woman, but becomes ruthless in her desperation to hang on to her beauty. Meanwhile, the photograph slowly changes, portraying the face she increasingly deserves.

She lives in the near future where getters have it all and the disadvantaged have no chance. Dorian's lover, Sybil Vane, a naive and talented singer, (Ellie Bryans), is driven to suicide. Her troubled brother, James, (Fabian McCallum), sees his life crumble, and her mother, Hope (Igra Rizwan), struggles



■ Kate Kennedy plays Dorian Grey in *Selfie*

in a world she can't understand.

The other characters are mostly stereotypes: clever and amusing but unconvincing. The play suffers from too many ideas, every modern problem is dragged

in, crowding out the main themes, but there are witty and insightful lines in a thought-provoking performance.

Until 28th November.

Jill Truman



■ Avita Jay as Samiya Picture Chris Gardner for Rare Moustache

## A solid-enough production let down by its predictability

**WARDE STREET**  
Park Theatre  
★★★★☆

You'd think the 2005 London bombings and aftermath offer more than enough drama for an 80-minute play, but actor-turned-writer Damien Tracey adds to the mix political intrigue, romantic scandal, and two ethnically charged revenge killings. Sadly, most elements here are fatally underdeveloped.

Warde Street – employing a reverse chronology that serves no purpose other than to flatten the denouement – opens with oily politico David (Tracey), shackled up with mistress Samiya (Avita Jay), facing further censure when her brother-in-law Ash (Omar Ibrahim) is accused of killing 7/7 widower Eddie (Shane Noone), murderer of Ash's wife Yasmeenah (Maya Saroya).

The second half flashes back to this deadly encounter in Ash's Manchester cor-

ner shop, and ups the thrill level with an armed hostage situation – director Jenny Eastop manages to wring some tension out of this, aided by a riveting performance from Noone as Eddie, desperate to trade grief for vengeance, and solid support from belligerent Ibrahim and empathetic Saroya.

Less effective is the turgid discussion between Tracey and Jay, and a reliance on well-worn conflicts, with Samiya observing that PR rules politics, Eddie making sweeping generalisations about Islam, and Ash countering that extremism stems from marginalisation.

One promising thread is the revelation that Ash, once a hard-partying depressive, only found peace after recommitting to Islam – something Eddie sees as another 'bereavement'. Adding less predictable elements would make for an engaging drama rather than a melodrama. Until October 26.

## Scorching satire on tabloid journalism tackles its topic with wit, glamour and flair

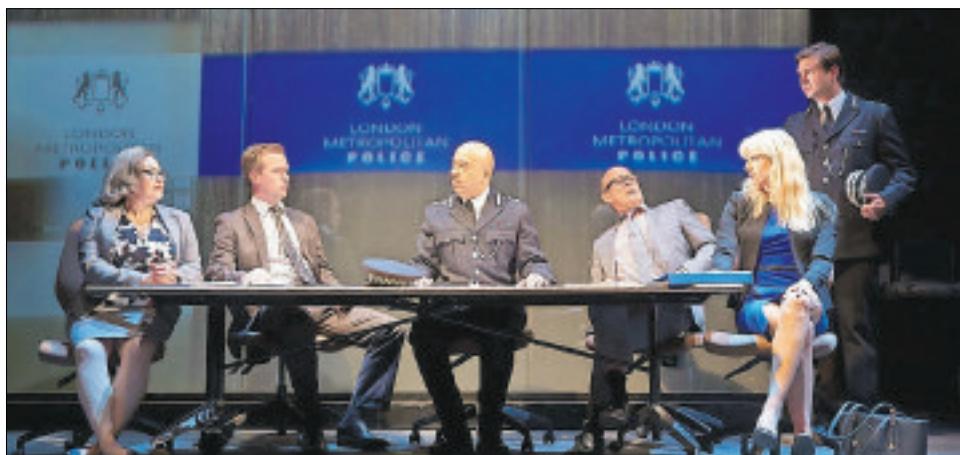
**GREAT BRITAIN**  
Theatre Royal Haymarket  
★★★★☆

Following a successful stint at the National Theatre, Richard Bean's *Great Britain* has bulldozed its way into the West End with its irresistible blend of scorching satire and slick, sliding production in tact.

Taking aim at the sleazy culture of tabloid journalism which came to a head in 2011, the show's original debut came hot on the tail of the hacking scandal and made little effort to mask the figures it was parodying.

Lucy Punch, who has succeeded Billie Piper in playing protagonist Paige Britain, has a history of assuming decidedly nasty characters and such experience shines through in her convincing portrayal of a potty-mouthed femme fatale.

Britain is the cruel, ruthless news editor of the *Free Press*, whose hyper-ambition sees her climbing the ladder through a



■ Great Britain at the Theatre Royal Haymarket

Picture: Brinkhoff M\_genburg

mixture of phone hacking, sexual deviance and ice cold decision-making.

Aided by a malleable set of screens which show rolling news channels and tacky front pages,

the joy of Bean's production is in the dialogue.

Every character packs as many

jokes as a night at the Apollo: Robert Glenister as editor Wilson Tikkell is Malcolm Tucker incarnate, while a recurring highlight is the sub-story of Police Commissioner Sully Kassam (masterfully played by Aaron Neil) as he haplessly blunders his way through a series of omnishambles, which at one point culminates in a voluntary taser.

Poignant moments are few and far between, and they don't always hit as they should.

When the sharp suits of the newsroom give way to monologues from Britain, lines directly lecturing on how the audience is implicated in the hacking scandal feel too heavy handed considering this is excellently implied throughout the rest of the play.

That aside, *Great Britain*'s quick fire scenes and dialogue seem at home at the Royal Haymarket. It entertains by examining a meaty topic, but does so with all the glamour and panache you'd expect of the West End. Alex Bellotti