

Reviews

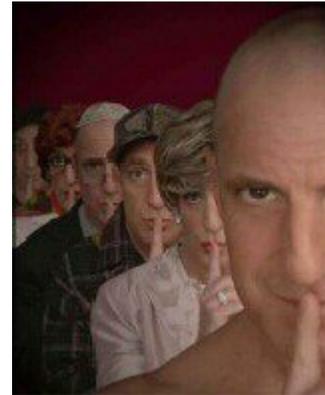
The British Theatre Guide

Rites of Privacy

Written and Performed by David Rhodes
New End Theatre, Hampstead

Review by Anita Butler (2010)

The sound of a word can obscure or embellish meaning: 'right' could be an entitlement to privacy, or the 'rite' that observes custom and ritual. *Rites of Privacy*, which comes here following a sell-out run off-Broadway, is written and performed by actor David Rhodes, a fine wordsmith who explores both forms of meaning.



The small stage bears a dressing table laden with make-up and wigs next to a clothes rail of varied costumes and is accompanied by a white backdrop of projected images, initially bearing quotes from Robert Frost, Judy Garland and Sigmund Freud, heralding that the evening will combine the poetic with the drama of the diva and the often troubled world of the inner mind.

Five characters embodied by Rhodes share the theme of assimilating from somewhere else and are drawn from a subtle blend of personal experience and fiction. Minute detail is paid to characterization, ranging from accent to the placement of blusher.

Each tells a story that is astutely observed, powerfully expressed, and has a sting in its tale: a fading southern belle speaks of her husband; a lumberjack of his brother; a woman of the consequences of her secret affair and a gay boy from Belgium of his lover. But it is the lamentations of a German-Jewish immigrant for his unborn ancestors that are arguably most poignant.

This form of dramatic monologue elicits rapt attention from its audience who is complicit as judge, jury, and confessional. By sharing the burdensome secret of each persona, we are encouraged to be more open-minded and accepting of

others who may resemble aspects of our own hidden selves.

Each tale is punctuated by a change of make-up and dress as Rhodes weaves candid personal anecdotes and evocations from his own life into the dramatic tapestry. The transition into real time between character changes is awesome. For the non-actor, it is almost shocking to see each 'lived-in' character so easily discarded while we move on to the next, but this merely shows the skill of a performer who knows his craft inside out and from every angle.

The solo artist is open to total exposure: there is no one to fall back on, no other player who can prompt with a cue line, but Rhodes seems to relish this brave aspect of performance. As he reveals his own painful past and resolved present we get the idea that we are all more similar than we think and that the 'terrible' secret really can be halved when shared.

Directed by Charles Loffredo, the intimate environment of the New End and its constantly high production standards is a perfect venue for Rites of Privacy: it is only right that it should sell out for the rest of its run. Spend ninety minutes in the charming company of David Rhodes, invest in the power of words, and allow your own secret heart a little dance of liberation.