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David Rhodes as Clarinda in Rites of Privacy

Venue: [New End Theatre](#)

Where: Inner London

Date Reviewed: 25 January 2010

WOS Rating: ★★★★★

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Secrets can be deadly, according to actor/playwright David Rhodes. During this intense and bold one-man show he confronts us with a motley cast of characters, whom he portrays one by one, transforming himself on stage with chameleon-like ease, using different outfits, accents and make-up to assume five different roles; characters with nothing in common, yet united by the heavy burdens of their pasts. The interim sections are peppered with anecdotes from Rhodes' childhood; here he plays himself, chatting as he changes, finally revealing a secret of his own that he has learnt to share. It's not as self-indulgent as it sounds.

The stark set is an actor's dressing room, with a rail of clothes and a dressing table. From the minute he strips down to his flesh tights, you see him as the blank canvas upon which he will paint these characters, taking us on a tour of dysfunctional America. We meet a past-her-prime Southern pageant queen, an elderly refugee who escaped from Nazi Germany, a gay Belgian drug pusher, a lumberjack Jew in New Hampshire and a suburban medic in a right muddle. Who'd have thought it possible during 90 minutes in Hampstead?

Their stories are uniformly bleak, as are his anecdotes. During their monologues, the characterisation is excellent, and the power of this play is born of the fact that this entire work is conceived, performed and held together by Rhodes himself. His ability as a performer is never in doubt. But if these characters were played by different actors, the play would lose its emotional punch; *Rites of Privacy's* fairly rudimentary warning about the dangers of keeping secrets is totally overshadowed by Rhodes' extraordinary versatility as an actor. The characters feel like a random assortment of snapshots of a pack of strangers; they are meticulously drawn, but ultimately transient. What will stay with me is Rhodes' own tale; I wish he had shared more.

-Christina Bracewell