

**London: THE MAGIC TOWER and THE STRANGEST KIND OF ROMANCE to 23 February.**

Posted by : Timothy Ramsden on Feb 17, 2014 - 10:31 PM

**London.**

THE MAGIC TOWER *and* THE STRANGEST KIND OF ROMANCE

by Tennessee Williams.

Pentameters Theatre 25 Heath Street/Oriel Place NW3 6TE To 23 February 2014.

Tue-Sat 8pm Sun 5pm.

Runs 1hr 45min One interval.

TICKETS: 020 7435 3648.

Review: Timothy Ramsden 16 February.

**Hoping against hope in downbeat surrounds.**

In Noel Coward's *Present Laughter* an ardent young playwright receives some sharp advice from his matinee idol Garry Essendine: "sit down and write at least twenty plays one after another, and if you can manage to get the twenty-first produced on a Sunday night performance you'll be God-damned lucky."

Very good advice; many a great playwright has a trail of lesser pieces behind the known masterworks. At present, almost every little theatre in London seems to be turning-up short, early plays by Tennessee Williams.

Minor, but often effective; Williams was a playwright of mood, finding dignity in defeat and illusion. The earlier, slighter, play here, from 1936, shows two lovers in a shabby flat. It's paradise for Linda when Jim is there, but loses its magic when he leaves the room – even if simply to steal much-needed food from the landlady.

This landlady, Mrs O'Fallon, indulges unemployed artist Jim while castigating the young woman she sees as ruining his life. Yet former actor Linda's guilty only of too much faith in the man who brings his works home bedraggled by rain after an art collector's turned him down.

Eventually they have to leave their shabby Eden, exchanging his dripping paint for the greasepaint and tinsel of Linda's showbiz life. But it's in *The Strangest Kind of Romance*, from six years later, that Williams creates a deeper intensity from the then modern idea of characters without individual names.

In another downbeat lodging-house, on the same set, created for Pentameters by design students, an aging Landlady's sexual advances and Old Man's political fury create a cacophony in which a tenant, finally dispossessed, can find a sense of emotional warmth only with an equally rejected cat.

Alex Froom's Little Man and Julie Taylor's Linda in *The Magic Tower* are acted with quiet dignity, contrasting them against the brash confidence of hostile, insensible landladies and those who, like Linda's former show-people friends, ride on roughshod on in the battle of life.

These two are people fighting quietly to find love in a production by Seamus Newham which expresses well the fragile transience of happiness.

*The Magic Tower:*

Linda: Julie Taylor.

Jim: Wim Mellor.

Mitch: Damian Regan.

Babe: Claire-Monique Martin.

Mrs O'Fallon: Victoria Kempton.

*The Strangest Kind of Romance:*

The Little Man: Alex Froom.

The Landlady: Francesca Wilde.

The Old Man: Jeffrey Kaplow.

The Boxer: Wim Mellor.

Director: Seamus Newham.

Designers: Alison Meredith, Juliette Rombotis, Mengo 'Dolly' He, Sophie Yesilyurt.