

Pretty Woman

Salomé

“It’s time to show you the polka-dot dress. And this one is blue.” Act II of the musical *Pretty Woman* opens with that line, which only makes sense if you already know the movie *Pretty Woman* inside out. The 1990 rom-com made Julia Roberts a star, and nobody took offence at the Cinderella relationship between a savvy streetwalker and the rich businessman who hires her. In only a week, he introduces an already independent woman to love, wealth and social acceptance, and she, in the show anyway, transforms him from corporate raider to lovesick swain who finds “Freedom” in her arms. Presumably, they live happily ever after.

Thirty years later, with the Me Too movement a constant political presence, sexual shenanigans can lead, very publicly, to court and to prison. Nevertheless, this stage adaptation of the movie arrived on Broadway in 2018 and has now reached the Piccadilly Theatre, bolstered by the film’s original text and many of the costumes (the polka-dot dress was brown on screen). Garry Marshall and J F Lawton added some new dialogue to Lawton’s screenplay; Bryan Adams and Jim Vallance wrote some songs; and the experienced Jerry Mitchell, who should have known better,

choreographed and directed the whole feeble enterprise.

You can understand why they were tempted. Wikipedia reports that the movie cost \$14 million and earned more than \$463 million globally, so perhaps this internationally recognised goose would lay further golden eggs. For me, the result matched the ordinary definition of “laying an egg.” Without actors convincing enough to carry the show’s gossamer premise, nothing happens at all. Characterising Vivian as a silly woman whose best friend must tell her where to shop in Beverly Hills, Aimie Atkinson flounces like a flirtatious child playing grown-up, and Danny Mac, as the gold-plated lawyer Edward, wears his charm like a well-cut empty suit. The new dialogue is corny, the score bland and instantly forgettable, and Mitchell’s dances barely ruffle the pace.

He has made a comic tango lesson for Vivian in which the hotel manager partners a bellhop – Atkinson needn’t even pretend to be a beginner – and a dreamy waltz to accompany the couple’s romantic excursion to the opera. There’s not room in the narrative for much more, and thank goodness. Having stuck it out to the end, my guest then commented, “No redeeming feature but the bellhop making his West End debut. It must have been a thrill for him.”



Above: Carmine De Amicis as Jokanaan and Harriet Waghorn as Salome in Edifice Dance Theatre’s production of *Salomé*.

By contrast, you couldn’t find a bolder statement of sexual power than *Salomé*, Edifice Dance Theatre’s interpretation of Oscar Wilde’s short sensual play, which was recently shown once, in the round, at The Place. Blending choreographic conventions to shocking effect, the company’s co-directors, Carmine De Amicis and Harriet Waghorn, have filtered the sharp extravagance of *Strictly Come Dancing* ballroom styles through the anything-goes fluidity of contemporary dance to explore a profoundly erotic story.

Having devised and co-choreographed the production, they portrayed, respectively, Jokanaan, an imprisoned prophet, and Salome, who lusts for him, supported by Fabio Dolce as King Herod, who lusts for Salome, his step-daughter. Two further dancers and two musicians, woven into the action to enhance the moody electronic score, completed the cast.

A remarkably elastic vocabulary swung the

feverish spectacle to grotesque extremes, from a reeling orgy in the decadent court to a spiritual solo for the prophet, who easily conjured the boundaries of his captivity with the yearning stretch of his arms. You could chart the dramatic progress of Salome’s passion in her fruitless seduction of Jokanaan, the explosive writhing of her sexual frustration and the voluptuous display that commands Herod’s obedience while rejecting his rapacious desire.

This absorbing hour of dance-theatre skirts the edge of camp by confronting its subject honestly, without the pussy-footing that often dilutes the theatrical expression of controversial topics. Lindsay Kemp lives in this piece, as do Aubrey Beardsley’s illustrations for Wilde’s *Salome*, and Wilde himself, thanks to five focused dancers and courageous choreographers who dare to be blatant. ■