



CRITICS' CHOICE

1. **'The Night of the Iguana'**
National Theatre, Lyttelton

A truly compelling evening is orchestrated by Richard Eyre's splendidly paced production. Alfred Molina and Eileen Atkins spearhead Tennessee Williams' wise and haunting tale of emotional and spiritual bankruptcy in the Mexican jungle.

2. **'Making It Better'**
Hampstead

James Saunders' intricate exploration of betrayal and exploitation against the background of the Czechoslovakian revolution sees a beautiful performance by Jane Asher and a blazing London debut by Rufus Sewell.

3. **'Bosoms and Neglect'**
Theatre Technis

John Guare's ingenious and hilarious treatment of illness and neurosis. Witty production by Daniel Banks.

4. **'From a Jack to a King'**
Boulevard

Mad musical antics, excellent covers and shameless rip-roaring fun in Bob Carlton's unholy tribute to 'Macbeth'.

5. **'Play Strindberg'**

Quarterdeck Studio, Mermaid

A grand success on a small scale for David Craik's production of Dürrenmatt's irreverent reworking of Strindberg's 'Dance of Death' at this newly opened venue at the Mermaid.

The Guardian

Theatro Technis

Michael Church

Bosoms And Neglect

GO OFF the beaten track, and you often find good things. Forlornly beckoning on a dingy thoroughfare behind St Pancras, Theatro Technis plies its trade in a minimally converted church hall: bare walls, high arched ceiling, just one stage entrance — ridiculous, really, to expect it to work at all. Yet this week it offers one of the most interesting plays in town.

Bosoms And Neglect is all of 12 years old, and deals with that great topic which Barbra Streisand has just discovered. Its author is John Guare, an American playwright whose fame has belatedly reached our shores thanks to the extraordinary lawsuit surrounding his award-winning play *Six Degrees of Separation*.

Did he — or did he not — have the right to lift someone else's life bodily onto the stage? The court has not yet decided. In *Bosoms And Neglect*, however, it's only Guare's own life, so the question doesn't arise, but what he does with a stint in analysis and a problematic Oedipal relationship is both complex and fascinating. The curtain rises or rather

the lights go up — on a man in extremis, as the cancer which his mother has been hiding from him suddenly hideously, breaks through her skin. This forms the prologue to what follows: a furious duel which he fights with a girl with whom he shares the same analyst. She may suffer from delusions, but she's very threatening: gradually, painfully, they reach an accommodation, and start a relationship.

The cancer's emergence is symbolic. The protagonist's real quest is for the truth about his infancy: like analysis itself, the play is an exercise in emotional detective work, and its dénouement is a coup de theatre which no review should give away.

In this intelligent production Campbell Graham and Debora Weston slug it out in a way which is both funny and frightening, while Eve Pearce invests the matriarch with Dickensian vividness and pathos. Daniel Banks, their young American director, is clearly a man to watch.

BY JOHN GUARE
 VENUE: THEATRO TECHNIS
 26 CROWDALE RD, CAMDEN
BOX OFFICE
071 387 6617

Time Out

What's On IN LONDON

Breast is best

BOSOMS AND NEGLECT
 Teatro Technis

"I love books about families, they read like science fiction" says angst-ridden American Deirdre — whose accounts of her own life are more compulsively creative than factual, and whose paranoia is such that she thinks her analyst, Dr James, has hired someone to ignore her in the waiting room. But she is not the only one of John Guare's creations with problems. Eighty-three-year-old Henny tries to treat her ulcerating breast cancer with a religious icon, whilst her bachelor son Scooper, another client of Dr James, suffers the combined effects of childhood trauma and life with a mother dedicated to suicide.

When Dr James starts his vacation, an eventful day dawns for Scooper. Preparing at last to elope with his mistress he instead discovers both Henny's malaise and Deirdre, a kindred devotee of literature and neurosis. As the abandoned analysts argue over whether they are in "deep classical" or "mere supportive", Guare engages with wit and a string of self-parodic literary quotes before darkening his tone with deft abruptness: introducing first violence then lengthy resolution.

The latter moves us into hospital, where now the characters are patients. It could be metaphorical, but then so could almost everything about this entertaining and engrossing play. Guare pens a stream of quotable lines ("Felt? Felt? They make hats out of felt!" sneers Henry at her son's feelings) whilst elegantly classical structure enables themes to emerge with unlaboured clarity and near farce to arise out of insignificant coincidence.

Whilst the characters occupy worlds of ironic conundrum (regarding each other as fictions but literature as real, reinventing their lives but dogged by their pasts, searching for metaphor via analysis but healed only when their shrink quits the scene), Laura Hopkins' set is by contrast remarkably at ease in the spacious theatre. As Deirdre, Deborah Weston is alive with zesty intelligence. Eve Pearce is sour without curdling in a physically acute portrait of old age; Campbell Graham believably embodies a dominated son. Director Daniel Weston has chosen a rich play and worked it well. I don't agree with his programme note: these people are not so unusual, in fact the real joy here is revelation — both hilarious and serious — of our deluded selves. (See Fringe)

CLAIRE HARRIS

'Bosoms and Neglect'

THEATRO TECHNIS

Both shocking and hilarious, this play by American John Guare is quite a revelation. It opens with 40-year-old Scooper's discovery that his octogenarian Mother, Henny, has cancer: her breast has a hideous hole like 'a peach with a large bite taken out'. This discovery inspires Scooper to speak finally to Deirdre, who he has silently observed in his analyst's waiting room for six years. What follows is a bizarre and complex story. Deirdre and Scooper's love for neglected authors, their emotional isolation, their reliance on analysis and their neglect of their ailing parents

are examined with a beady, sardonic eye.

Guare ignores quaint received notions of taste, presenting illness and neurosis in a starkly humorous way that would make Woody Allen blanch. At first, Campbell Graham and Debora Weston are a little too bright and superficial while spouting Scooper, Deirdre's manic psycho-babble and Eve Pearce's quavery emotion (as Henny) get lost in the venue's poor acoustics. But the trio gather speed and conviction as Guare's play becomes ever more darkly ingenious. Director Daniel Banks evokes the scabrous humour, the rich depth and genuine compassion of Guare's script and presents a final image of touching stillness. But this production is mainly to be praised for its uncompromising, wicked wit. *Nick Curtis*

PLAYBILL recommended shows

1. *Angels in America* (National - West End). AIDS victims and the American Dream seek and find the intercession of angels in Tony Kushner's magic realist play, deftly interpreted by Declan Donnellan.
2. *Outside of Heaven* (Fringe - Royal Court Upstairs). Fishing, football and pop music are replaced by more darkly adult concerns when suicide rocks a group of friends. Penny Clivewicz impressively directs Martin Sadoleski's bleakly uncompromising vision.
3. *La Bête* (Fringe - Lyric, Hammersmith). A whirling dervish of a modern American verse-play, illuminated throughout by Alan Cummings' spectacular, magnesium-bright performance as a garrulous, 17th century playwright.
4. *Bosoms and Neglect* (Fringe - Teatro Technis). Ironic conundrums are mapped with wit in John Guare's entertaining and elegantly structured drama about guilt, neurosis and self enlightenment.

108 TIME OUT FEBRUARY 12-19 1992

40 — MONDAY 10 FEBRUARY, 1992

THE CRITICS

Evening Standard

JOHN Guare, who wrote this play, is about to go on trial in the States for stealing someone's life. One of his previous works, *Six Degrees of Separation* — a Broadway smash — tells the true story of David Hampton, the man who became a celebrity on the gullible New York party circuit as the son of Sidney Poitier. Hampton wants a share of the spoils.

If Guare were a no-hope playwright, one might not regret his summons. But on the evidence of *Bosoms and Neglect*, Guare is a very fine dramatist whose silence would be theatre's loss. Perhaps there is something Wilder about the whole business: "For each man kills the thing he loves..."

Bosoms and Neglect isn't very nice to the sort of New Yorkers who are obsessed by the shrink. Guare's characters have neuroses about what neuroses they should be having, and are so clouded by self-concern that they neglect to take in what is really important in life.

Bosoms and Neglect
 Teatro Technis,
 Mornington Crescent

RICK JONES

After a chance encounter, two fellow patients of the same psychiatrist, Dr James, get to know each other for the first time. Scooper and Deirdre compare notes, belittle each other's progress and vie for the title of sickest person. Scooper is only in analysis, but Deirdre is in therapy.

The play is built around coincidences — chance meetings, overheard conversations — but the biggest and most obvious coincidence of all has gone unnoticed. Scooper's real name is James, the same as the doctor.

Similarly, Scooper fails to notice the truth when it arrives out of the mouth of his octogenarian, blind but frank, mother. He knows that all his problems are supposed to be rooted in his childhood. He wants



Cantankerous: Eve Pearce in *Bosoms and Neglect*

admissions, not truth. The bosoms come in in Freudian terms, naturally. They are birth ("my first connection"), death (mother's cancer) and sex. Scooper misses his mother's wisdom for a roll in the hay with Deirdre.

The final scene with the sightless old woman passing insights to an empty chair is an outrageous manipulation of the audience's sense of pathos. Eve Pearce is excellent as a cantankerous self-willed Henny. Campbell Graham's

Scooper and Debora Weston's Deirdre are less convincing, though their discipleship of the god-like doctor is credible.

There is a sense of the disciple in director Daniel Banks's programme notes to John Guare. ("We crave the joy. We love the plays.") Accordingly, Banks minimises movement and gives full weight to Guare's flowing American English and irresistible feel for the blackness of the comedy.

THEATRE

NEW REVIEWS

▼ BOSOMS AND NEGLECT



Theatro Technis. By John Guare, directed by Daniel Banks, presented by Fifth Floor and Theatro Technis.

In the midst of this play's rushing torrents of words and elaborate rhythms of speech, there is a communication breakdown. Two bookish New York pseudo-intellectuals, Scooper and Deirdre, discuss neglected authors whilst the real world turns outside. Deirdre (Debra Weston) copes with her insecurity and loneliness by telling huge lies, whilst Campbell Graham's Scooper sees anything unplanned as a hindrance to his elaborate infidelity with his best friend's wife. Both are in analysis with the same shrink, and cope with life by shutting it out. Literature is their mutual escape and a cold sensuality descends as they quote favourite passages, compelling them into physical intimacy and violence. Meanwhile, Scooper's blind mother Henny has been rushed to hospital with a huge cancerous hole in her breast. Eve Pearce gives this difficult role dignity, neglecting her health, yet refusing to comply with her son's selfish wishes to end her life. Writer John Guare was responsible for the brilliant screenplay for Louis Malle's film *Atlantic City*, and the same hallmark of black humour in the face of tragic circumstances can be found here, energetically directed by the up-and-coming Daniel Banks. (Helen M Jerome)