

ALSO SHOWING

*** **An Ideal Husband**
 Chichester Festival Theatre

More than 100 years after it was written, Oscar Wilde's comedy remains popular, despite a melodramatic story, overlaid with witisms, concerning an ambitious politician whose career and marriage are threatened by a scheming woman. The occasional adoration of pure pleasure, but a middle-class can feel less some. Not true, however, when Partridge Houlidge holds forth as the opinionated Lady Harky. The speech may be redundant, but her unstoppable delivery is a high spot of the evening.

Some of the play's power comes from the menialholly tone that underscores its plea for tolerance, a mood not Kavanagh's production. Jamie Glover makes a sly and determinedly furious Lord Goring. Wilde's alter ego, and Edward ex-husband's and sisters as an incest. Robert Barbist never convinces as a driven politician and Emma Pellegrini's Mrs Cheveley lacks the desperation of a woman

who risks everything. But when the pace drops, you can almost drool over Simon Fieger's handsome design. **JE**

*** **Snowshow**
 Touring

Steve's Snowshow may feature traditional figures with big red noses and very long shoes, but this is clowning raised to the level of art and magic. Breathlessly rich and strange, full of madcap laughter and the deepest pathos, with silent encounters of human longing, friendship, love and loss, there's nothing quite like it in theatre. By the end, the audience of (mostly) children are literally screaming with delight, as huge coloured balloons the size of houses came bouncing off the stage and sailed over our heads. **CH**

*** **Hope**
 Royal Court, London SW1

Last Christmas, the playwright lack, Thorne and the director John Tiffany triumphed here with Let the Right One In. Who, wonder, raced across Peter Jones' for hunting when the talented duo announced they would return this year, only with a play about facial cancer cure? The stakes explored here are important, but — poor those who tore through JK

Rowling's *The Casual Vacancy* and lived all those exploitation scenes in Bergen — it's a questionable whether they are the stuff of gripping drama.

It starts promisingly, Tom Scud's set — a recognisable municipal hall — is where we first encounter the deputy council leader, Mark (the appealing Paul Higgins), rehearsing a speech explaining the swiffling £22m cuts he and the council leader, Hilary (Stella Gonet), must force through. Shamed by a grass-roots campaign, Mark and his labour colleagues pin their hopes on gaining public support by defying Westminster and refusing to set a budget.

But will this be seen as heroism or recklessness? At times, this play feels like a beleaguered working-class town is never identified, and that lack of rootedness is frustrating in the second half. It focuses on and momentum, and descends into tragedy. None of the secondary, non-councillor characters ring particularly true, either. Like the failure. **PN**

*** **Jane Eyre**, Christopher Hart and Patricia Nicol

But its old one-act status doesn't mean it should be overstated — indeed, it seems almost fitting for a show about dogeeply discontented, genre-toting musings. When not musically targeted the beloved factor, Assassins has the audience's squinting discomfort in its sights. This profless, rave-style show practically asks for your dislike, then sets about earning your attention and admiration through fanatical zeal. The orchestra here roams agilely across a variety of musical styles, from folklike folk to a pastiche of raucous 1970s pop. Not a whodunit but a whodunit, the show displays the spruwaning

THE CRITICS

long since established itself as a mini temple to Southsea: every one of its reviews to date has been a profound pleasure. Still, staging Assassins as its Christmas show was anything but a safe bet. The New York premiere was adulatory received, and the piece has never quite found its place among Southsea's works. But its old one-act status doesn't mean it should be overstated — indeed, it seems almost fitting for a show

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of individuals who have taken a pop shot at America's leaders. It crisscrosses historical periods, whisking us through the story of John Wilkes Booth (a trim, restless, aviator Aaron Lincolin, who in 1865, to John Ford, who in 1981, injured Ronald Reagan. Southsea's 19th and John Woodman's book about American myths about

boundless possibility and success with an epic of personal failure, as mine stories swirl around each other in a kind of centring canonised of upended dreams. Jane Lloyd's madly exhilarating production pitches us, into an America that resembles an amusement park or pleasure ground gone wrong, dark and lurid. A litiground proprietor (Simon Lipkin, the bearded face of lightning and lightning, "I'll"

critics an assortment of cravens, nudges, fantasists and added idealists into this shooting gallery and equips them with licitars. After all, as the proprietor seductively growls: "Everybody's got the right to be happy... if you keep your goal in sight, you can climb to any height. Everybody's got the right to their dreams." In South, Gilmore's adoring design, the gallery, with its tangled ceiling of lightning bolts and lightning, "I'll"

and "Miss" signs, is littered with a heaving, screeched pierrot's head and a battered bumper car. It's partly a belated headspace, partly history's equivalent of a Corey Island freak show. "What I did was kill the man who killed my country," claims Twell's smooth booth, though it seems more likely he pulled the trigger because of many stage reviews. Mike Mashburn, decided out in a stashed Santa costume, brings a rained

dequence to Samuel Bjerk, whose denunciations of politicians and hopes of crashing a plane into Nixon's White House all came to nothing. And Andy Wynant performs a manic life of exaltation before capping up the scaffold as the irremissible Charles Gutman, would be ambassador to France and killer of President Garfield. The production's romantic ballad, University of Your Love, is sung with lily.

blubber, dipped sincerely by Illickley (Larry Morrison), his failed assassination attempt on Reagan was motivated by the obsessive desire to win the heart of the First Driver star Jodie Foster. Listening to it is like having a slug slung up the back of your neck. Plying a wail, the Port assessor, Catherine Tare (pictured fourth from right) provides a glibrous comic creation, rather than a psychologically connecting one. As the dandy, trigger-happy, housewife and dilapidated Sam Lane Moore, she cracks up joyfully tossing bullets like popcorn. And Jamie Parkers, who plays the hump, eating, easy smiling balladeer, perpetually invoking the can-do American spirit, doubles as a romantic Lee Harvey Oswald, deciding whether to shoot JFK. He finds a sort of bliss as blood, red teardrop runs down on him. America's parable of optimism seems a cruel joke. This is a musical that's hard-edged without being sentimental or unably generalising its subjects. Most of these, push their sense of disappointment and entitlement as far as their guns. **E**

*** **Assassins**
 Phoenix Chocolate Factory, London SE1

It's a killer of a show



Political esp! The cast of Assassins

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