



U.K. DRAMA WITH EVERYTHING BUT THE INTENDED KITCHEN SINK: (left to right) Adam Driver, Sarah Goldberg, and Matthew Rhys in *Look Back in Anger*. Photo: Joan Marcus



Theater Review

Look Back in Anger:

Blimey, where's the kitchen sink?

LOOK BACK IN ANGER

Written by John Osborne

Directed by Sam Gold

Through April 8, 2012

Roundabout at Laura Pels Theatre

Harold and Miriam Steinberg Center for Theatre

111 West 46th Street, (212-719-1300)

www.RoundaboutTheatre.org

By David NouNou

While watching John Osborne's oh-so-dated revival of *Look Back in Anger*, here is the thing that struck me the most: Was I watching a dress rehearsal or an actual performance? In the original text of Mr. Osborne's script, and I quote, "Everything, including the kitchen stove, is gathered under the slanting roof of this one-room attic flat deep in the English Midlands. It is furnished with a double bed, a couple of sagging, seedy armchairs, a so-called dressing table, and a dining-room table with chairs, an ironing board and a bookshelf." However, in this current version, a solid black wall stretches across the entire stage of the Laura Pels Theatre (incidentally, this wall is accosted with every abuse imaginable) with a few folding chairs, a mattress, a dresser, a stove, an ironing board and enough filth and squalor to be condemned by the board of health.

This poses another question: Is this atrocious, unimaginative set by Andrew Lieberman due to budget constraints or has he read the actual, original John Osborne text? This brings us to the next problem: The lack of direction by Sam Gold. When you do not have an actual set to anchor the show and you have no doors for the entrances and exits for your actors, leaving them standing on the sidelines by the theater's railings, it is not exactly creative direction. Has creativity and imagination gone out the window, or have the teams that bring these shows to the stage just become so lazy and cheap?

In 1957, when it was first presented on Broadway, this play was supposed to be revolutionary; a new voice was being heard. Gone were the drawing-room comedies and dramas, and the term "angry young man" was coined. The "kitchen sink drama" (where everything takes place in the kitchen and not parlor rooms) was born. In reality, this was true for the English and their discontent with the economy. However, the Americans created far superior "kitchen sink dramas" in the 1940s,

with actual substance in them. Just think of Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* or Arthur Miller's *Death Of A Salesman*

As the lights finally dim at the Laura Pels and the blaring music finally subsides, we discover that it is a dreary rainy Sunday afternoon in the Midlands. Jimmy Porter (Matthew Rhys) and Cliff Lewis, a Welsh lodger (Adam Driver) are both working-class people, but Jimmy by far is the more learned and intellectual. Both are reading the newspapers (since there is no real furniture, Jimmy sits on a folding chair, and Cliff either lies on the floor or sits at the edge of the stage). Hence, the reference to a "dress rehearsal" while Alison Porter, Jimmy's wife (Sarah Goldberg), is doing the ironing.

The conversation gets heated, and the subject turns to Jimmy berating Alison's family, who come from the upper middle class, and he had to convince them that he would be good enough for her. After finishing berating her family, he spews his venom on Alison. In a tussle with Cliff, they knock over the ironing table, causing Alison to scald her arm. Jimmy storms out and Cliff is left to console Alison, and she informs him that she is going to have a baby.

Act II introduces us to Helena Charles (Charlotte Parry), Alison's actress friend whom Jimmy despises. She convinces Alison to leave Jimmy and, in turn, moves in with him. Act III brings Alison back, sans baby.

While watching this show, it reminded me yet again of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, in which Stella leaves her upper-class ties for Stanley. At least Stanley provided her with decent, clean, and livable surroundings and loved her. I cannot imagine why any well-brought-up girl would want to live in this particular abusive environment and squalid flat for one day, let alone through a marriage and be constantly barraged and mistreated, especially when she has an escape. With the direction the actors are given, they recite their lines adequately. This version of *Look Back in Anger* presents Jimmy Porter not as an "angry young man," but just another rebel with absolutely no cause.

Edited by Scott Harrah

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