

The Death of Gogol and the 1969 Eurovision Song Contest

Edited reviews from the 2005 Drill Hall production:

Commissioned by the Drill Hall, *The Death of Gogol and the 1969 Eurovision Song Contest* is Tim Luscombe's second play with a song contest theme (the first, *EuroVision*, was also produced at the venue before transferring to the West End) and *The Death of Gogol...* is a triumph.

However, it isn't just a celebration of Eurovision; it's far more than that.

The camp contest is used by Luscombe as a means to hook the audience, but it's also a moving exploration of one man's agoraphobia and an examination of the thin line between being a fan and fanaticism, sanity and madness, procrastination, and developing a split personality.

If all this sounds rather depressing, then fear not. Stuart's reliving of the 1969 Song Contest punctuates the play's most harrowing moments, lightening the mood and offering not only a contrast but many a laugh-out-loud moment.

Playing Stuart is Duncan Wisbey (from Alistair McGowan's *Big Impression*). It's an amazing performance, with Wisbey convincing in all of the parts he plays – it's a one man show with a cast of thousands! But while it's a mesmerising watch it's not always a comfortable one. The audience are taken on a roller-coaster ride of emotions and are often wrong-footed - laughing one minute and stunned into silence the next. The writing and Wisbey's performance produce a heady mix of comedy and drama that is thought provoking, involving and entertaining.

Rainbow Network

Whatever preconceptions we may have surrounding the mythology of the Eurovision Song Contest, it cannot prepare you for the vision that Tim Luscombe has created.

After ten years, Stuart has finally completed his radical treatise on the effect of homosexuality on Nikolai Gogol. Before he posts his work off he has to prepare dinner for a rather unexpected date with his window cleaner. As if his procrastination can become any more laboured, he decides to watch, once again, his video recording of the 1969 Eurovision Song Contest.

Duncan Wisbey is a superlative performer, able to generate all the excitement and anticipation of the contest in the guise of Dutch entry, Lenny Kuhr, while easily slipping into other, more menacing personae such as Gogol's manservant or, perhaps more telling, the character of Gogol's *Diary of a Madman*. Wisbey also performs excerpts from many of the entrants, gives a rendition of Kuhr's *De Troubadour* number in perfect Dutch, and, as the communist Kuhr, swipes a few well-timed bon-mots at British arrogance and Lulu's entourage.

This production encapsulates as perfect a balance of tragi-comedy as can possibly be achieved. The song contest offers the opportunity for laughter and tension while the real human tragedy of Stuart's pathetic, doomed existence is skilfully intertwined with the death of the Ukrainian writer.

The Stage, Paul Vale

Highly entertaining.

What's On, Helen Chappell

A light-entertainment first half with lots of singing for Lenny and Eurovision jokes... In the 2nd half, things get more serious and more interesting.

Admirable... Engrossing...

Time Out, Kieron Quirke