

Creative Cow



Pinter's complex and brilliant early work **The Lover** is currently enjoying a vogue with several versions on tour and an uninspired production playing at London's Comedy Theatre, Panton Street. Cast and director from Panton Street could sharpen their game if they were packed off to see a modest, low-budget version by a young company, **Creative Cow**, whose run has included Romsey, Hampshire.

The treatment is a sustained delight in which director Amanda Knott avoids any mannered silences but still allows the text room to breathe. She achieves almost musical phrasing from the cast who at times give their exchanges the spare, concrete quality of verse as they probe half meaning and intimation. Jack Hlland as Richard and Katherine Senior as Sarah contrive to make every moment sexually charged in the way that the London version is so palpably not. And despite keeping their delivery clipped at all times, the pair avoid the cardinal error of throwing off the opening exchanges like a drawing room comedy.

The plot concerns sex in the suburbs and complex role-playing. Guardian critic Michael Billington - who has directed the piece - describes **The Lover** as "one of the most candid and revealing plays about sex in the English language." Nothing is explicit but the audience soon begins breathing in a heady musk. Crucially, Katherine Senior proves equal to the demands of the plot's fulcrum when the husband breaks the rules of their game and she must do without the veneer of middle class breeding.

As the playacting reaches a peak, wife congratulates husband on the grounds that "things are beautifully balanced", a quality that is one of the many merits of this production. It should be remembered that despite its popularity in live theatre, the work originated on television. But the technical resources of both actors prove equal to the challenge of a text that can leave performers cruelly exposed. At the end of the evening the cast relaxed with Pinter's revue sketch "**Trouble in the Works**" during which they proved as playful as dolphins.