

THEATRE

**TAKEN IN**

Barons Court Theatre

W14 to 5th March

Rating: 5 Stars!

X-Rayed Sex!

TAKEN in – as the title suggests – explores a relationship on at least two levels, the duplicitous and the nurturing. It's a theme made further explicit by the show's poster, which echoes that iconic, nude shot of Yoko Ono enveloping John Lennon like a sexualised mother. But Taken In goes further still, examining the conundrum of a punter falling for a rent-boy with forensic fluency.

Okay, it's easy for envious and inexperienced guys to slag off paid-sex scenes with self-righteous clichés, but the reality – mercifully – is far more intriguing. Take rent-boys. Far from being scouless, sexual predators, gay-for-pay hardmen who'd as easily batter a guy as fuck him, they're actually insecure too. Oh, not to the extent of needing counselling in diapers, but believe it, it takes more balls to go see some anonymous trick than calling an escort!

Ultimately, it's down to trust, on both sides; a knife in the dark can be waiting on either side of a door! Break the initial ice, however, and a can of much more delicious worms starts rearing its head: chemistry.

Punter Marc (Gareth Watkins) is an older, textbook gentleman, but one troubled that his needs are becoming predatory, deadening his emotions in the process. Slowly, he's



slipping into the habit of viewing sex as yanking a dick with a price-tag attached, not a human being! Cheeky renter Danny blows that idea overnight. The steamy sex lingers in Marc's head as persistently as bird-flu and suddenly he suspects rent-boys have a mind as well as bodies! In other words, this marshmallow sweetheart's falling in 'love', the most taboo word for gay men after 'AIDS victim!'.

Why is that? In a word, fear! Both parties, usually, are petrified of rejection if they show the slightest feeling for each other. But not here; imperceptibly, Marc and Danny slip from customer and

product to lover and beloved, as in the following, typically pithy exchange: "I'm not a customer tonight?" "So who said I was working?" Danny smirks.

Utilising a subtle, tenderness of direction mostly absent from gay plays, Taken In touchingly charts Danny's growing level of trust in Marc. There's Danny's beautifully symbolic bath scene, washing away his years of abuse and misunderstanding. Thoroughly cleansed, he curls up on Marc's sofa like a lost embryo returning to the womb! A finely-sketched portrait of dawning love then, only marred by a technique best confined to Restoration plays or Michael Caine's *Alfie* - direct asides to the audience. Needlessly intrusive, they're over-emphatic detours in an otherwise perfectly-pitched show, the gay *My Fair Lady* of trust and social grooming!