

Communicating Doors

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HAVE you ever wondered what lay behind the mysterious locked door in the corner of your hotel room or fancied trying to walk through it? If not, Alan Ayckbourn's revival of his fantastical 1994 comedy thriller *Communicating Doors* will set your mind off, the next time you make a dotcom late booking.

Apparently, nostalgia ain't what it used to be, but in this case it's true because the 2010 vintage of *Communicating Doors* is even better than the original. Ayckbourn's time-travelling play has travelled well, rather than dated, with its future vision of London entirely feasible, and its satirical echoes of *Psycho* and *Carrie* a delightful conduit for knowing humour.

His cast is another gem as he continues his run of superb productions since stepping down from the artistic director's role to focus on writing and directing.

Sixteen years on from its debut, Ayckbourn has moved forward his filmic play's timeline, and so it now opens in 2030 rather than 2014, but still in Suite 647 of the Regal Hotel, in a future London where local councils are at war and virtual sex is the ultimate thrill.

Call girls still have their place, but now insecure Essex girl Ms Poopay Desir (Laura Doddington) prefers to call herself a special sexual consultant when called to the suite, where doddering old Reece Wells awaits. He is not interested in her charms in leather and doll-blond wig; instead he wants her to witness his confessions. Why her? All will be revealed later.

The Faustian Reece (Ben Porter) has plenty to get off his failing chest: he had both of his wives bumped off by business partner Julian (a creepy Kim Wall), while accruing his wealth from dirty arms and commodity deals.

Julian has plans for terminating Poopay too, but a communicating door in the suite facilitates her escape to... 2010, where she encounters a very much still alive second wife, the briskly organised Ruella (Liza Goddard), in the same hotel room.

This door provides access to change the course of history, and so, armed with the confessions, Ruella in turn travels back to a 1990 nuptial night to forewarn first wife Jessica (Laura Howard) of the murderous fate awaiting her.

Jamie Kenna's hotel security man, Harold, is not alone in thinking madness is afoot, but it is all madly enjoyable, wonderfully inventive, occasionally scary, as the three women team up in a battle again time (or times plural) to bump off Julian.

The film-noir atmosphere is lovingly built by designer Michael Holt, lighting designer Jason Taylor and composer John Pattison; the pastiches of Hitchcock and *The Twilight Zone* are a joy (watch out for the hand!); and the performance of Wall will make your skin crawl.

Doddington, on her Scarborough return to the SJT, and Goddard, with her comic timing, are tremendous leads, sometimes frightened, other times frightfully funny. What this unpredictable, ultimately moving, play will do for the Scarborough hotel trade, who knows, but the theatre box office should be booming.