

theatre



A Life In Three Acts

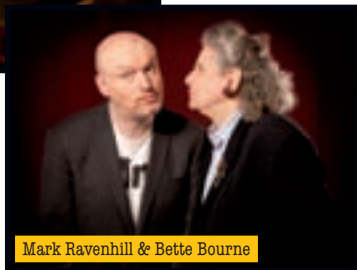
Director: Mark Ravenhill
Starring: Bette Bourne, Mark Ravenhill

More of a rehearsed conversation than a play, *A Life In Three Acts* gives drag legend Bette Bourne the chance to tell his life story, which fascinatingly coincides with the gay liberation movement.

Larger than life, we hear Bette coughing off stage as Mark Ravenhill tells us that the show grew from a recorded interview between the pair. After swishing on stage in a glamorous gold blouse, he begins his story. He talks warmly of his mother, who, in fits of giggles, hides with him under the bed during the blitz in Stoke Newington. His father, however, is a violent man who

wounds Bette by refusing to accept either his bourgeoising acting career or his penchant for drag.

Overflowing with pain and joy, often simultaneously, Bette tells us about going to gay lib meetings in '30s gowns, taking LSD in a drag commune, the terror of AIDS and his anarchic drag theatre troupe the Bloodlips. But it's his parents who cast the longest shadow over the evening: his father's



Mark Ravenhill & Bette Bourne

coldness fuelling his rebellious streak and his mother's love of Gilbert and Sullivan providing him with his love of the theatrical.

Now more of a living legend than a jobbing actor, it's a shame Bette has to refer to the script - which is on a stand in front of him - so often, because when he freewheels alone or sings unaccompanied, the results are electrifying. Still, if that's the price we must pay to

hear such a rich, detailed and moving account of gay history, then it's really no cost at all. ★★★★★

• **A Life In Three Acts is at the Soho Theatre until 27 February.**
• www.sohotheatre.com

Six Degrees Of Separation

Director: David Grindley
Starring: Obi Abili, Lesley Manville, Anthony Head

First shown on Broadway in 1990 and then made into a film starring Will Smith in 1993, *Six Degrees Of Separation* is back on the boards where it belongs. It's inspired by the real life story of a gay, African-American con artist who tricks his way into the worlds of some wealthy white Manhattanites pretending to be both a friend of their kids from college and the son of legendary black actor Sidney Poitier.

Rising star Obi Abili charms - and

goes full-frontal - as Paul, a hot young gay guy from the streets who gets with a geeky posh boy in exchange for a low-down on the elite families he mixes with. With this knowledge, Paul enters into their worlds and cons them into thinking he's a part of it. One such family is the Kittredges, headed by Kandinsky-loving art dealer husband and wife Flan and Ouisa.

Lesley Manville is masterful as Ouisa, lending the play all of its knowing New York wit and sass. And it's the relationship between Paul and her, which gives the play most of its complexity; part maternal, part flirty, there's a whole lot of love, even after Ouisa realises Paul has pulled the wool over their eyes. And it gets all the more interesting as Paul's motives become cloudier - he's not after their money, but something altogether deeper. ★★★★★

• **Six Degrees of Separation is on at the Old Vic until 3 April.**
• www.oldvictheatre.com



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