

The Masque of the Red Death Review
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One hell of a party!

Roll up, roll up, the Duke Prospero invites you into his home, a sanctuary sealed away from the Red Death ravaging the countryside and towns. We, the selected few, the audience - represented by artists dolls propped around the small stage – take a house tour with the Duke and his blandly efficient servant, and are allowed to share his strange quirks of taste for fine wines and food. But as the macabre evening gathers pace, an uneasy humour gives way to something more chilling, and we are drawn inexorably towards our fate. The clock ticks on, but just how safe are we? Challenging Death is a risky business.

This two man show, a dramatization of the classic Edgar Allan Poe story, was adapted for the theatre and directed by Philip Holyman. Simply staged, the set dominated by a doorframe and a clock, much of its creepy effects are realised through clever lighting and sound.

Gareth Nicholls as Prince Prospero, the central character and solo voice in the drama, negotiates the move from smug rationality to increasing paranoia with great skill and Philip Holyman adds to the eerie atmosphere as his deadpan manservant, whose expression only cracks once – horrifically - into gibbering fear. Both actors give excellent performances.

This is a thoroughly unsettling evening from a writing and acting partnership dedicated to adapting and performing classic stories, in the belief that there is an audience for such work in the theatre. On the evidence of their production of 'The Masque of the Red Death', that belief is justified.

Jan Pick