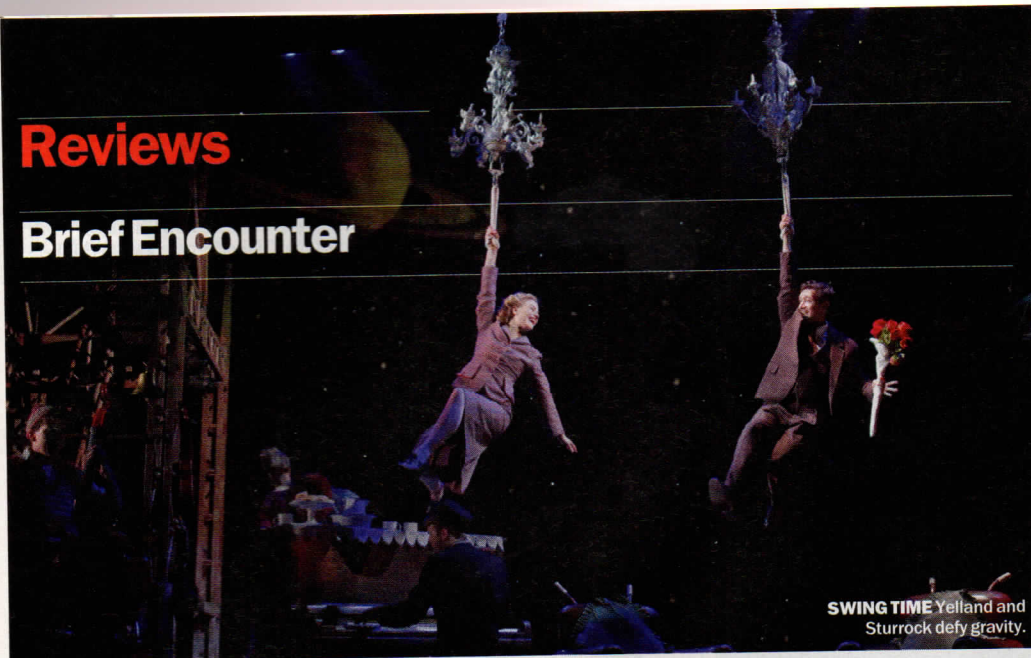


Reviews

Brief Encounter



SWING TIME Yelland and Sturrock defy gravity.

★★★★★

Studio 54 (see Broadway). Based on Noël Coward's *Still Life* and *Brief Encounter*. Adapted by Emma Rice. Dir. Rice. With ensemble cast. 1hr 30mins. No intermission.

They're cheering—cheering!—at Studio 54, as England's Kneehigh Theatre pulls off one clever and adorable coup de théâtre after another. Having caught *Brief Encounter* last year at St. Ann's Warehouse, I'm not quite so agog when Hannah Yelland runs through a movie screen and then appears in the black-and-white film, or so ravished when she and Tristan Sturrock literally swing from chandeliers as video champagne bubbles up behind them. This highly theatrical adaptation of Noël Coward's

one-act *Still Life*, which he subsequently diluted for the screenplay of *Brief Encounter*, uses music-hall interludes, multimedia and cabaret to tell an old story in newish fashion. And audiences love it. Far be it from me to demur; the show is perfectly charming and uplifting, a night of devised-theater whimsy performed by a very likable cast. But you do have to wonder if those effusive Roundabout subscribers should perhaps get out more.

Gaining greater experience in life and the price it exacts is one of the key motifs here. Yelland plays the tremulous, unsatisfied housewife Laura, whose banal meeting of a doctor named Alec (Sturrock) at a railroad café becomes an ecstatic yet anguished pas de deux toward

infidelity. Yelland is wonderfully magnetic and sympathetic; her fresh, lovely features work great on the big screen, yet she has the physical prowess to hold her own amongst athletic fellow actors.

Although *Brief Encounter* offers plenty of comic embellishments and artful stage business, it is most powerful when it quiets down to give the material's sorrow full scope. Adapter and director Emma Rice's use of Coward's songs—"A Room with a View" and "Mad About the Boy," to name two—makes structural (if not always tonal) sense, even if you wish the cast included stronger singers. But then again, it's the whole artful package, not its individual parts, that seems to sweep some people off their feet.—*David Cote*

Critics' picks



A Bright New Boise

American Idiot

See Broadway
This Green Day–scored hit electrifies your senses with the pop-punk odyssey of three suburban friends.

A Bright New Boise

See Off-Off Broadway
Idahoan strip-mall drones face crises in faith and family in Samuel D. Hunter's smart new comedy.

The Divine Sister

See Off Broadway
Heaven help us! Master of drag and camp Charles Busch is back and he's making fun of nuns!

Fela!

See Broadway
Bill T. Jones gets you dancing to the music of Afrobeat pioneer and political firebrand Fela Kuti.

La Cage aux Folles

See Broadway
Kelsey Grammer and Tony winner Douglas Hodge headline this savvy, muscular revival.

The Little Foxes

See Off Broadway
Minimalist, modern and elegant yet brutal, this Ivo van Hove revival of the classic drama is revelatory.