

THE STAGE

Reviews

Theatre

by [Nick Awde](#) - Mar 11, 2004

Adapted by Rosemary Friedman from her novel, this is based on the real-life story of Julia Polak, a heart specialist who discovered in 1995 that she herself needed a heart-lung transplant. With friends like top cardiac surgeon Magdi Yacoub, she bounced to the top of the waiting list for donated organs and had a successful transplant. A hefty list of intriguing issues indeed and it is to the credit of writer and subject that all are addressed - and more - as Polak becomes Jesse Sands (Julie-Kate Olivier), a sick cardiologist forced to debate the ethics of queue-jumping with her husband Dermot (John Kay Steel) as well as her eminent colleagues, Gary Condes' Eduardo and Bala, played by Emilio Doorgasingh. Her dilemma is offset in the wards by the device of teenager Anna (Estelle Morgan), also awaiting a transplant, and her concerned dad, TV celeb Jack, played by Clive Moore - as well as the threat of romantic complications.

As the wilful, intelligent Jesse, Olivier leads a strong ensemble that suffers somewhat from a degree of miscasting. Only Morgan seems

fully at ease, sparkling as the feisty Anna who clings to her dreams of a normal life.

Surprisingly, few of the characters or their predicaments are genuinely sympathetic. As a result, the central irony of Jesse's situation is lost - crucially fudged is her fall into scalpel fodder from the heights of the insatiable arrogance common to medical consultants.

Despite a script punctuated by impassioned Shavian pleas for further research and scientific exposition, Michael Gieleta's firm direction ensures a successful outcome for this challenging work of issues and human drama. With further tweaking, particularly in the cluttered Act II, this would make an intelligent choice for the West End.

Production Information

New End, London, February 4-March 6

Author

Rosemary Friedman

Director

Michael Gieleta

Producer

New End Theatre

Cast

Julie-Kate Olivier, Gary Condes, Emilio Doorgasingh, Clive Moore, Estelle Morgan , John Kay Steel

Running time

2hrs 40mins