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## The Critics

### NOEL COWARD'S BRIEF ENCOUNTER

#### The Cinema Haymarket, Haymarket, SW1

KNEEHIGH Theatre's adaptation of Brief Encounter, David Lean's 1945 classic film, is the first live show at The Cinema Haymarket since 1960. The company are faithful to the film when it comes to the central love affair, quoting verbatim from the screenplay in many places, but at no stage does this appear limiting.

Rather, the encounter is brought to life, with Naomi Frederick as Laura and Tristan Sturrock as Alec superbly portraying the subtle development of the affair.

Characters and plots of minor importance in the film are bulked up in the stage show so that both the irascible Mrs Bagot and the downtrodden Beryl engage in love affairs of their own.

Arguably the most important development is the use of music to further the narrative and create atmosphere.

In addition to a pair of non-acting musicians the entire cast play various instruments and sing throughout the show. All but one of the songs are written by Noël Coward and give a wonderful 1940s flavour.

Stuart McLoughlin, who plays Beryl's beau, Stanley, has a beautiful, emotion-laden tenor voice that deserves particular mention.

Some aspects of the production work less well than others – moments when the cast mime being washed over by waves and blown by gusts of wind were unconvincing and strange.

This doesn't take away from the success of the rest of the show however, as puppetry, projection and swinging from the chandeliers catch an inventive yet wistful mood. Not to be missed.

– JO CAIRD