

## Reviews



**The Plan** directed by Michel Fagadau with Aure Atika, Thomas Chabrol, Robert Plagnol, Natacha Régnier or Sophie Quinton. Studio des Champs-Élysées en février 2008

**Le Canard  
enchaine**

*Bernard Thomas*

**Andrew Payne, the British writer well-known for his screenplays, is a champion of liberated characters.** Their louche morals and frank dialogue titillate the audience's libido. When the curtain rises, Tom, the eternal kid (Robert Plagnol, who did the adaptation with Vanessa Chourau, excellent as ever in his laid-back way), has just made love with Sarah (Aure Atika), a wild young woman who's married to a friend of his. And he's feeling sad. "You feel like you've just had good sex, that's how you feel," she says. As she's not free for a week or two, she urges him to make a pass at a blonde bimbo he's met: "Then you can tell me all about it". And when he protests that the only thing that turns Sarah on is hearing about bad sex, she elaborates: "I want to know everything. What they wear, what they eat. What they talk about, down to the smallest detail" The scene is set: it's going to be wilder than the traditional French hanky-panky.

Second scene: blonde Annie (Natacha Régnier) has come back to Tom's place. As Tom said, a fey, whimsical creature. She draws flowers and little pigs, is a big fan of picnics and the North Sea. That doesn't mean she hasn't lived a bit: her ex-boyfriend used to tie her up sometimes, which was really scary, especially the time he went out and met a mate and forgot all about her, that was really bad. By the way, would Tom like a line of coke? Now we're really cooking ...

Third scene: Sarah in bed one evening with her husband, Craig (Thomas Chabrol), mega-obnoxious, domineering, a borderline fascist who she tolerates. There are compensations: money above all. They have two children, and he adores them. He's a

banker. He's loaded. That helps. And not stupid. About his oldest friend Tom, he says: "Friendship fluctuates, it's like the stock market. As far as our friendship with Tom is concerned, your stock is on the up, and has been for some time" Then he turns the knife: "Tom is always meeting someone. And you're always angry about it. I can't imagine why". Sarah: "Unbelievable!".

Fourth scenario: Annie moves in with Tom, discovers he has cocaine addiction issues. Sarah becomes increasingly jealous which provokes an existential crisis in her marriage. But contrary to expectations, it's not the smart, bourgeois friends who get Tom out of the hole, it's Annie with her airy-fairy stuff about yoga, spiritual retreats, her pebble talismans, her driftwood sculptures and her sketching. And holding down a job. She says "Tom is high on Life. What more could you ask for?" Sarah has to deal with her repressed feelings for Tom. She tells Annie "Tom is my friend. Sex ends, friendship lasts. You fuck. That won't last forever." Well, nothing is ever that simple. But the director Michel Fagadau, has such a deft touch, such subtlety in telling us the story behind the scenes, that **we come out of it amused and refreshed.**

**LE FIGARO**  
magazine

*Philippe Tesson*

This is nothing new: every year in Paris we discover five or six comedies from London or New York that demonstrate the vitality of young Anglo-Saxon drama. Its personality is increasingly defined around a few common criteria, so much so that one is tempted to call a new trend, even though it borrows a great deal from the cultural tradition of those countries while refreshing it. This kind of drama is violent, harsh, often aggressive, but very sincere. It is the mirror of a young, restless society, where everyone is searching for their own truth, more through experience than reflection, but at the same time very concerned to cling to the social order. It is deeply rooted in today's reality and expresses its most concrete aspects. It is raw in its themes and moral in its conclusions. **Sentiment is omnipresent, but usually understated. In terms of form, the writing is taught, dry, and its construction deliberately sequential, strongly influenced by television.** It has little in common with French theatre, to which it is giving massive shock treatment.

We have chosen a work that is highly characteristic of this trend: *Plan B* by English author Andrew Payne, adapted by Vanessa Chouraqui and Robert Plagnol and directed by Michel Fagadau, who are all highly effective. Desperate power struggles are woven around the central character, a tortured drug addict played with painful sincerity and superb violence by Robert Plagnol. The conflict between cynicism, despair, contempt, tenderness and purity, perfectly reflect the mores, weaknesses, vices and malaise of

Western society.

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*Armelle Héliot*

*Anglo-Saxon excellence*

With Douglas Carter Beane's *Une Souris Verte* at the Tristan-Bernard and Neil LaBute's *La Forme des choses* at the Petit Théâtre de Paris, two American playwrights, British playwright Andrew Payne's *The Plan* directed by Michel Fagadeau confirms the power of a certain kind of Anglo-Saxon theatre.

These plays, written by well-known, established and experienced writers, speak to us of today's world and highlight the lives, hopes and torments of the younger generation. Thirty-somethings are in the spotlight. In *Le Plan B*, four friends, two young men, two young women. Two couples. Sarah (Aure Atika) and Craig (Thomas Chabrol) are married. Sarah enjoys a physical relationship with Tom (Robert Plagnol) who is at the heart of the play. He is brilliant and destructive. He doesn't know what he wants. He meets an attractive and complicated young woman, an artist called Annie (Natacha Régnier). Drugs, alcohol, the desire to obliterate themselves, these thirty-somethings may not be crazy but they hesitate and float like teenagers, even those with children of their own like Sarah and Craig.

The story draws out the cruelty in all of them. **It's very subtle, written in a harsh, unaffected language** translated by Vanessa Chouraqui and Robert Plagnol. In the rhythmic tension of the vocabulary, there is all the disarray and desperate powerlessness of the quartet. Craig appears smoother, but Thomas Chabrol does a good job of suggesting the cracks. Aure Atika is very precise and ambivalent. Natacha Régnier gives Annie a disarming grace and lightness. Robert Plagnol, excitable, disturbed and heartbreaking, is magnificent. Michel Fagadeau adds just the right amount of movement, a kind of socio-political and metaphysical ballet, to this powerful performance.

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*Jacques Nerson*

A vitriolic portrait of Blairite England

The plot is multifaceted. One leads to the character of Sarah and her unexpected turn of events. A married woman, she is having a loveless affair with Tom, a reformed addict, which is all sex, nothing but sex. But after meeting Annie, who foolishly provides him

with coke, Tom falls off the wagon. Sarah, who has done much to get him off drugs, sets out to get rid of Annie. When she fails to do so, it is Sarah's jealousy that pushes Tom back into using. Oh, this is not an 'issue' play... As in *Synopsis* and *Squash*, which premiered at the Petit Montparnasse in 2006, **English playwright Andrew Payne is happy to portray his contemporaries in an unflattering light. But isn't there some truth in that?** You see a lot of young middle-class people like that these days: cool attitudes and hearts of stone. The harshness of their language and thinking is commonplace. Natacha Régnier, Aure Atika, Robert Plagnol and Thomas Chabrol, are all frighteningly excellent. Michel Fagadau's *The Plan* is a joy to behold.

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*Dominique Jamet*

Mixed doubles

After *Synopsis* and *Squash*, British author Andrew Payne strikes a (great) third blow with *The Plan*. Craig, a banker, is making money. Thanks to this, his financially secure wife Sarah can supervise the upbringing of their two children from afar and devote most of her time to her two hobbies, an occasional contribution to a magazine and regular dates with her lover Tom. Tom is a freelance journalist and occasional writer, otherwise he drinks and takes drugs. Everything goes wrong when the trio is joined by Annie, who is so stupid that she still believes in love, and so in love that she craves Tom's redemption.

And that's it. **It's direct, it's brutal, it's crude, it's cruel, it's an unvarnished portrait of a generation without reference points** and youth without boundaries. In addition to the regal Robert Plagnol, we relish the strange beauty of Aure Atika, the freshness of Natacha Régnier and the subtle, restrained performance of Thomas Chabrol.

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*Arlette Frazier*

Andrew Payne, a British writer known for his screenplays, has a penchant for characters on the fringes of society. In *Plan B*, they are four thirty-somethings who are fairly representative of today's society. The central character, Tom, is a burnt-out drug addict

whose mistress is Sarah, a pretty woman married to Craig, his best friend. Between them, there are no feelings, no love, just sex.

The husband, a banker, turns a blind eye; all that counts is money and power. Sarah isn't free, so she pushes Annie, a ditzzy blonde who sketches, makes driftwood sculptures and does yoga, into the arms of her lover. But the blonde, not as naïve as she seems and ready for new experiences, moves in with Tom. Sarah is furious and angry, and out of revenge drives Tom back to drugs. He'll pull through in the end. **False friendship, manipulation, cynicism, a laissez-faire attitude - it's all there in this cinematically written play, divided into eleven scenes, in which the playwright skilfully creates a distinct unease.** Michel Fagadau's direction is fast-paced, tense and successful. His four actors are perfect. Robert Plagnol, who also adapted the play with Vanessa Chouraqui, is as disturbing as you could wish for: laid-back, high-spirited, electric and violent. Aure Atika is a fearsome malcontent, Thomas Chabrol a cold, domineering man. The sweet blonde Natacha Régnier is all maternal tenderness and castration. The comedy is dark and very contemporary, reflecting the malaise of our society while humour is never far away.



*Armelle Héliot*

Génération trente ans. Pour eux tout se donne sur le mode du superlatif. L'écrivain britannique en saisit quatre, réunis autour du plus destructeur d'entre eux. Passionnant et remarquablement joué, notamment par Robert Plagnol.

Pour qui s'intéresse à la jeunesse, **cette pièce est passionnante car elle traduit quelque chose de très spécifique d'une certaine génération.** Celle qui a aujourd'hui, mettons en Europe, une trentaine d'années. Ou un peu moins. Attention, *Le Plan B* n'est pas un ouvrage de sociologie. Et le quatuor que nous présente l'écrivain britannique Andrew Payne n'est pas représentatif de l'ensemble d'une génération. Mais tout dans cette pièce sonne juste et l'on reconnaît des manières qui sont consubstantielles à notre temps.

Bien sûr, cela ne suffirait pas à donner de l'intérêt à cette cruelle comédie. Les sentiments, les manières excèdent l'anecdote et c'est aussi l'universalité de l'histoire qui touche. Traduite par Vanessa Chouraqui et Robert Plagnol dans une langue drue dans laquelle les hyperlatifs sont légion (« j'ai méga envie de partir ») et dans laquelle chacun « hallucine »..., la pièce est assez âpre.

On ne vous racontera pas l'intrigue. Disons qu'il y a deux garçons et deux filles. Sarah, femme énergique, sévère, voire cruelle mais pas seulement (Aure Atika, très bien), est l'épouse de Craig parfaitement égoïste, passionné par l'argent, heureux en affaires, brutal dans ses sentiments (Thomas Chabrol). Face à eux, Tom, l'ami par excellence (Robert Plagnol, extraordinaire), qui se détruit et disloque tout autour de lui... Et Annie (Natacha Régnier, beauté solaire au regard désarmant de pureté), que tout le monde maltraite.

Comment se développe l'action. Comment se croisent les personnages. Comment les mouvements de l'âme et du corps sont ambivalents. Comment l'alcool coule trop et comment la drogue circule de manière irresponsable, tout cela Andrew Payne le raconte. Mais, ici, la mise en scène de Michel Fagadau, nerveuse, cassante, est essentielle et donne sa vraie puissance au spectacle.