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ALSO SHOWING

John

Lyttelton, National Theatre, London SE1 ★★★★

Lloyd Newson has forged a unique form of docu-dance: verbatim interviews set to restless, squiggly physicality. The technique shines in DV8's new piece, a lost soul's memoir in movement. As John (the extraordinary, slippery Hannes Langolf) moves from abusive childhood through to drugs, crime and prison on a charge of arson he barely recalls — "I know I'd been a naughty boy" — Anna Fleischle's superb swivelling set revolves like a plywood circle of hell. Langolf stumbles, squirms and pivots on the spot — he's not going anywhere — while his fellow smackheads wobble like ninepins. The show swivels, too, when John, on probation, takes refuge in a gay sauna. The set becomes a cruiser's warren, and Newson's puritanical gaze turns to this crepuscular world, with its tumbling bodies and insistent pelvic bob: "All life is there and bare." John's voice returns, closing this unsettled show about the ache to find a place of rest. ***DJ***

Sweeney Todd

Harringtons Pie and Mash Shop, London SW17 ★★★★

There have been several fine productions of Sondheim's grisly masterpiece recently, but none quite so unexpected as Bill Buckhurst's, which is staged in an authentic pie and mash shop in Tooting. You can even order a pie before the show starts. You wouldn't want to afterwards. As Jeremy Secomb's Sweeney Todd seeks his revenge, the actors scramble over the tables where the tiny audience is sitting. Todd's razors flash alarmingly within inches of one's nose. The noise of the London streets, where the musical is set, seeps into the shop. Like meat and potatoes, comedy blends with horror as Siobhan McCarthy's Mrs Lovett proposes merging the business of being a barber with that of making pies. Only the ending is bungled, but mostly Buckhurst conquers the tricky logistics to stage a flavoursome production in which every word of the lyrics can be heard. ***JE***

Jonah and Otto

Park Theatre, London N4 ★★★

"Love is paying attention," says one of the characters in Robert Holman's gentle, insinuating two-hander. The playwright's unshowy dramas are easy to overlook, but the London premiere of this 2008 work is a reminder of why he is worth attending to. There's much to love about it. We are eavesdroppers on an encounter between Otto (Peter Egan), a clergyman who has lost his belief in God and himself, and Jonah (Alex Waldmann), a young drifter carting his dozing baby around in a shopping trolley. The play mulls on contradictory appearances and the incalculable effect two people can have on each other. As the strangers talk, they edge toward empathy, then step, literally and metaphorically, into each other's shoes. But Tim Stark's production doesn't fully bring out Jonah and Otto's desolation, or allow them to matter to one another (or us) as deeply as they might. ***MS***

Jane Edwardes, David Jays and Maxie Szalwinska

★★★★★ **KO** ★★★★ **A-OK**
★★★ **OK** ★★ **So-so** ★ **No-no**

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