

The Mother/Coming Home

Soho Poly

Dario Fo and Franca Rame, the writers, performers, actors and cult heroes who can fill a football stadium in their native Italy, are the troubadours of radical activism. Above all, they have taken the turgid earnestness out of political writing and replaced it with Marxist farce (the brothers and Karl). Remember the maliciously comic *reductio ad absurdum* of the Carabinieri's case in *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*?

The actress Christine Edmunds and the director Sue Dunderdale worked with them during their visit to Riverside Studios last year, whence the idea of premiering this duo of Fo/Rame one-woman shows at the Soho Poly came.

Coming Home opens the evening

in what is now classic Fo/Rame deceptively lighthearted style. It follows the brief break-out of a working mother from her family's battery housing in a high-rise block. Miss Edmunds talks us through her day and night, painting vivid characters and situations using the evocative strokes of her own impressive talent and the rich palette of the script. The performance is gutsy, infectious and brilliantly paced - every word and gesture so observant of the minutiae and little rituals of everyday life.

Yevtushenko once said something to the effect of scratch an ordinary person and you will find someone deeply interesting underneath. Which is, in a sense, the message of the piece: that however human beings are similarly packaged, their lives are rich nexuses of experiences and needs. Here the similarity of the boxes leads to a paradoxical ending.

The second monologue presents us

with a complete change of mood. It confronts us with the situation of a second "ordinary" mother suddenly faced with the discovery that her son is a terrorist. Some might balk at its powerful emotional rhetoric and implicit apology for direct action (its colour and life echo Gorky's and Brecht's works of the same name), but the fierce compassion is the plea, the plight we are begged to imagine, and the chilling nature of the events related challenge cosy opinions and prejudices.

The contrast of the roles could not be greater, the range of response from an actor could hardly be more stretching, and the depths of experience to be plumbed could rarely be more demanding. Christine Edmunds rises to every challenge. In the best tradition of Fo/Rame you do not have to be a believer to be seduced.

Robert Page