

Mike Hayward – FRINGE FIRST WINNER

JACK Rees is an actor. The stage, protected from the outside world by an invisible wall, allows him to breathe. He is given an identity and told where to go and what to do. But once the curtain is down is there a real person behind the character? Glasgow's A L Kennedy was recently named as one of Granta's top 20 young British novelists. The 27-year old has drawn on her experience as an aspiring actress to write her first play. *The Audition* traces the sad life of a failing actor, from his non-conformist upbringing in Wales to later descent into self-loathing and drunkenness. There are moments of bleakness but a strand of strong, affecting humour runs through his acute and lyrical monologue. Mike Hayward (best known as Alun Morgan in *Take The High Road*, gives a breathtaking display of his theatrical range. He holds the audience in the palm of his hand in a brilliant portrayal of an actor 'just a couple of scenes short of a full performance'. Kennedy has found the perfect actor for a demanding role. It is a fine performance and also a remarkable début from a talented novelist who looks set to become a playwright of distinction.

TOBY HAMDEN

### ***"Nine to Five"***

INTIMATE RAPPORT: Mike Hayward is superb as the wayward Welsh actor Jack Rees in *The Audition*

Even the best informed, most diligent of theatre-goers would be hard pressed to catch all the plays performed every night in and around London. Occasionally a gem must slip through the net, unseen due to pressure of time or simply not knowing it was on. This must not be allowed to happen with a one-man play, *The Audition*, by Alison Kennedy. Performed by Mike Hayward (Alun Morgan in *Take The High Road*), *The Audition* is a funny, perceptive, passionate portrayal of Welshman Jack Rees. Over two hours Rees instructs his audience in the actor's art, rambling off into intriguing glimpses of his own past: strict-chapel-family, only child, lay preacher, actor-turned-alcoholic.

Rees entralls the audience ~ with irreverent, wicked anecdotes of his adventures from ' school nativity play to the West End, tempered with poignant glimpses of a man unable to separate life from the stage, or the bottle from his lips.

Shut out by his parents who are incapable of showing him warmth and love. Rees seeks out fame as an actor. But the legacy of his childhood overwhelms him and unable to commit to anyone or anything, his only constant comfort is the vodka bottle.

Hayward as Rees is superb, moving from uncontrollable laughter to rage and desperation with the smoothness of a well-edited film. He creates an intimate rapport with the audience, carrying us along with his snapshots of the past, making asides and collapsing with laughter at his own jokes so that we are completely taken in and, like Rees, we can't distinguish the real actor from the character part.

The Audition is Kennedy's first play and won a Fringe First at Edinburgh last year.

It is a stunning piece of work. You don't need to be a Welshman to love it (the British Council deemed it right for a two month tour of India in spring this year), and you don't need to be a theatre buff to appreciate it.

At a mere £6 a ticket (C4 concessions) you will have enough money to buy a stamp and send Kennedy a fan letter - she deserves one.

Nicky Pope

## ***Kala Academy, Goa***

By Cyril D'Cunha

PANJIM, April 5:

Man of a thousand faces. A dancer and a preacher. Yeah! A drunk and a clown. Wait a minute! What have I missed?

That's what Mike Hayward kept everyone wondering in his solo take-off in the play "The Audition", which was held at the D M auditorium of the Kala Academy on Monday.

It was a complete package of consummate artistry, with the performance held to my knowledge for the first time back stage, with ringside viewing. Intimate and utterly engrossing.

An actor's actor, who as one critic described, "treats life like an audition and auditions like life", sums up aptly Hayward's performance.

Hayward is Welsh and built like a tank. Yet, whatever novelist A L Kennedy intended Jack Rees to be in her play "The Audition", must have been amply and satisfyingly mirrored, not only in the visage but even in the subtle intonations of perfect English of the lovable Hayward. To use a like description for champion pugilist Mohammed Ali "he floated like a butterfly and stung like a bee."

Hayward, a veteran of the National Theatre in the UK, did just that minus the violence, and much more. Jabbing the air, contorting a look, mimicking with fluidity and throwing barbs like accurate punches, which drew unaffected laughter. He has this funny way of saying things, making even a four-letter word ride lightly. For instance, like when Jack Rees, when a 11 year old, asks Mrs Sopworth his teacher to come to his flat and sit on his face for free.

Hayward interprets and feels for Rees pain, booze, contemplated suicide and even God's mercy. He quotes Chekhov and Audrey from "The Three Sisters" to summarise Rees' life, almost having the audience lapping the cunningly phrased monologues, which only he in a "One man show", could have done so beautifully and effectively.

The show was jointly, presented by the British High Commission, British Council Division, Bombay and the Kala Academy, Goa.