

THE INDEPENDENT



Thursday 3 January 2008

Theatre

THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD

Warehouse
CROYDON

I'm quite a fan of the composer and record producer Rupert Holmes. He produced *Lazy Afternoon*, one of Barbra Streisand's best albums at the pop end of the spectrum, and he also wrote some pretty good numbers for her (eg "Widescreen"). Thanks to YouTube, we are now in a position to witness the excellence of a further collaboration with Holmes/Streisand that never made it into the shops. He was the producer on a second Broadway album, which the company shelved because they did not want to be seen to be trying the same trick twice too soon. The eventual *Back to Broadway* ignored the earlier material, which is a great pity because some of the performances are knockout.

One of the best is Streisand's rendition – all liquid loveliness as it negotiates the ravishing loops of the melody – of "Moonfall", a song from Holmes's own musical version of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, which, in Ted Craig's buoyant, enjoyable production, is the Christmas show at the Warehouse, Croydon. This is a weird, in-



Buoyant: 'The Mystery of Edwin Drood', an interactive musical based on Dickens' final novel PJ CLARK

teractive music hall-style exploitation of Dickens' uncompleted final novel where the audience gets to vote on a number of crucial questions left unresolved in the book – such as the murderer (if he was murdered) of the title character. I regret to say that "Moonfall" is the best song in the score by a wide margin and that the talents of Holmes, who wears three hats as composer, lyricist and book writer, are overstretched.

Presided over by Stefan Bednarczyk, who wields a mean gavel and leads the band from his piano, the proceedings make you think that this must be an attempt to create a "Side By Side By Sweeney Todd". The lyrics rhyme with relentless cleverness, all of them clicking tiresomely into

place like a set of maniacally jabbering false teeth. In Rufus Wainwright's great song to Jeff Buckley, "Memphis Skyline", there's the eloquent injunction "Relax the cogs of rhyme". It should be nailed in pokerwork over Holmes's desk. A further trouble with the piece is that its Americanised ear for English musical modes (mock Victorian ballads etc) is, let's say, approximate. So it's a cod cod – a pastiche transmitted by Chinese whispers.

The audience is given a good time and I was glad to be among people enjoying themselves – even if I was party-pooing in the privacy of my own mind.

PAUL TAYLOR

To 24 February
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