

Yes, Prime Minister, they're laughing at you

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Yes, Prime Minister (Chichester Festival Theatre)

Verdict: I'm waiting for Yes, Deputy Prime Minister

Rating: ★★★★★

Full house at Chichester for Yes, Prime Minister, the TV comedy which has been turned into a farce.

The audience loved it. Aphorisms abounded. There were even a couple of topical references to coalition government.

A four-star evening? Yes.



Power play: Henry Goodman, left, as Sir Humphrey Appleby and David Haig as Jim Hacker

The set (Prime Minister's study at Chequers) is opulent. The actors (who include Henry Goodman, David Haig and Jonathan Slinger) are first-division names.

The comic timing is sound. But a corner of me remained unmoved.

Maybe it was because the plot, for all its outrageousness, is not quite as amazing as what is happening in real politics at present.

Or maybe it was because the whole thing is overdone by about 15 per cent, the main culprit being Mr Goodman's Sir Humphrey Appleby.

Yes, Prime Minister is, in many ways, a peach. Its observations on the chicanery of Whitehall are as cute as ever.

Writers Sir Antony Jay and Jonathan Lynn give their characters a near-cessless diet of great lines.

The actors are fed like liver-pate ducks.

PM Jim Hacker says to Cabinet Secretary Sir Humphrey: 'I don't know what else I don't know. Do you know?'

'Power abhors a vacuum,' murmurs Sir Humphrey, 'and we are currently led by one.'

Yet Mr Goodman does not really murmur anything, at least not in a convincing manner.

He smiles too much for a top civil servant. He is too heavy handed in his coy cunning.

Was the TV version of Yes, Minister not more subtle? Is such deftness not possible on a stage?

Mr Slinger is slightly better as Bernard Woolley, the PM's principal private secretary, although just as Mr Goodman suffers in comparison to the TV version's Nigel Hawthorne, so Mr Slinger lacks the quiet patience Derek Fowlds brought to the part.

He banana-bends his legs too much, although a moment when he rubs his face in despair is beautifully done and allows Mr Slinger to use his elastic features to full effect.

David Haig's Jim Hacker is, well, David Haig. No one does rising panic quite like Mr Haig.

And his performance has the advantage over the other two principals of not being remotely like its TV predecessor.

The plot involves a big oil deal which could extract the British government from a financial hole. It is being arranged with a country called Kumranistan.

Alas, the minister from Kumranistan asks Bernard to supply him with an under-age prostitute. Unless his demands are met, the deal is off.

The Chichester audience did not demur at the risqué elements of the plot. On the whole, the humour has an old-fashioned feel and is a safe distance from the tartness of *The Thick Of It*.

I know I am being fussy. It is fiendishly difficult to re-create such a loved TV series.

But satire has a hard time keeping up with recent political events.

Watching this production, which will no doubt be a hit, I yearned to know what writers Jay and Lynne would make of Nick Clegg and David Cameron.

How about Yes, Deputy Prime Minister?

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/reviews/article-1280061/Yes-Prime-Minister-Yes-sir-theyre-laughing-you.html#ixzz10zp2nMca>