

Pants-down politics

Steve Williams finds out what audiences can expect at next month's showing of *Out of Order*

Robin Kermode is hoping that he gets more laughs than a dead body. That should not be a problem. The British actor plays Richard Willey MP in the upcoming British Theatre Playhouse (BTP) production of the popular political farce *Out of Order*.

An all-British cast has been assembled for the production, written by Ray Cooney and winner of the prestigious Laurence Olivier Award for Best Comedy in its original London production.

A seasoned stage, TV and film actor, Kermode has appeared in countless stage productions and British TV series such as *Never The Twain*, *Men Behaving Badly*, *Emmerdale Farm*, *Birds of A Feather*, *The Bill* and *East Enders* and can currently be seen as former British PM John Major in the award-winning Margaret Thatcher bio-

pic, *The Iron Lady*. Kermode says working with Meryl Streep was “breathtaking to watch and to be a part of. She is technically brilliant, and watching her work was a master class in film acting”.

A quintessentially British farce, *Out of Order* is a “typical” day in the life of Willey, a suave Junior Cabinet Minister. And what a day it is — unfaithful pants-down husbands caught with lingerie-clad mistresses; an innocent sidekick; a bewildered hotel manager; jilted husbands and wives adding to the mix of mayhem; and, of course, that dead body. All these illicit goings-on occur in suite 648 of the Westminster Hotel, London.

Kermode believes *Out of Order* has the “wit of *Yes Minister* and the aching comic pain of *Fawlty Towers*. Both find the comic potential of bursting the bubble of British pomposity”. He says Singapore audiences can expect “a very funny, stylish evening”.

The actor suggests that the farce remains a staple of British theatre as the British have “always had a great sense of humour, especially in adversity. It’s a cultural way of coping. A theatrical comedy should make people laugh and a farce should make people laugh uncontrollably. It’s about real characters in unusual circumstances coping the best they can, where one lie turns into another until the necessary explanations appear ludicrous”.

Of course, farce is not just a British theatrical phenomenon. Kermode used to love watching Lucille Ball as a child. “She was a brilliant farceur,” he says. “Her reactions were huge but always totally believable. It’s the only way farce works. First, we have to believe

Out of Order is presented by the British Theatre Playhouse and will play at the Jubilee Hall Theatre, Raffles Hotel from April 11 to 15

Bookings

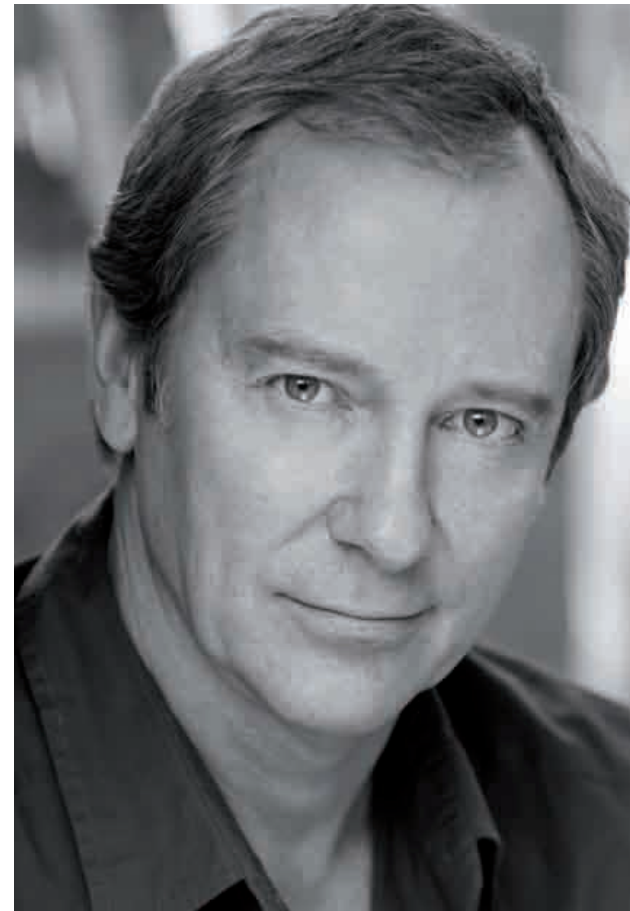
- For the Charity Gala on April 11 — www.britishtheatreplayhouse.com
- For performances on April 12 to 15 — www.sistic.com.sg; Sistic hotline: 6348 5555; or Sistic agents

the situation. Then, we care; then, hopefully, we can’t stop laughing”.

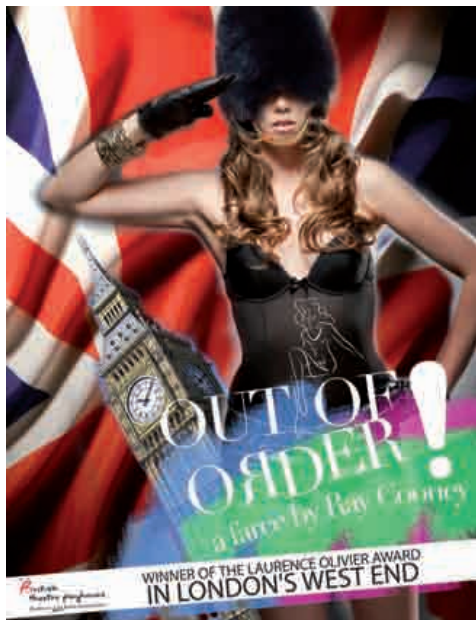
Cooney is a master of the bedroom farce/sex comedy and has presented 17 farces in London’s West End, including *Run for Your Wife* and *Funny Money* (which was presented by the BTP in 2005). Kermode says although farce is a difficult genre to perform, Cooney’s experience is very beneficial. “I remember having dinner with Ray in London and laughing all evening. His rhythms are pretty perfect, which helps,” he says.

Out of Order will be directed by David Warwick, who appeared in the original West End production and directed the British production for the English Theatre in Vienna. This will be his fourth production for the BTP.

The play opens at the Jubilee Hall Theatre at Raffles Hotel on April 11 with a Charity Gala Premiere to benefit a local charity. Dr Tony Tan, President of Singapore, will be guest of honour. The



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play runs until April 15 before opening in Kuala Lumpur.

BTP directors John Faulkner and Cecilia Leong-Faulkner have produced and presented a series of highly successful British productions in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka and the UK since 2004. *Out of Order* will be their 11th production. Faulkner will also appear in the play as “The Waiter”.

What’s next for Kermode, following *Out of Order*? He is looking forward to seeing his stepdaughter star in her school play — as Tallulah in *Bugsy Malone*. As he says, “It doesn’t get much better than that.”

Steve Williams enjoys discovering and telling stories