

FIRST NIGHT

Likeable Manford gets in on the act for music, mystery and murder

Curtains

Wyndham's Theatre, WC2H

★★★★☆

Nick Curtis

FANS of musical curios will flock to this in-joke theatrical whodunnit, completed by composer John Kander in 2006, two years after the death of his long-term writing partner, lyricist Fred Ebb. It's witty, knowing and delivered with enough skill to satisfy completists, but not a patch on the pair's other great c-word hits, Cabaret and Chicago.

Curtains centres on the murder of the leading lady during tryouts in Boston for a substandard musical cowboy version

of Robin Hood, aiming for Broadway in 1959. Life echoes art. Paul Foster's competent touring production, energetically choreographed by Alistair David, was pulled into London to fill a hole in the West End. It looks exposed here.

The ostensible leads, comedian Jason Manford and Carley Stenson, are likeable but insipid in underwritten parts as the stagestruck detective and a songwriter returning to her acting roots. Their thunder is stolen by Rebecca Lock as the cynical producer and Samuel Holmes as an egotistical British director.

The best songs are the sardonic *It's A Business* and *The Woman's Dead*, with a chorus line of phoney reactions to the hated victim's passing. The romantic



Leading man: comedian Jason Manford plays a stage-struck detective in the theatrical whodunnit

subplots are mercilessly sent up, in a show that never removes its tongue from its cheek. Here, the tendency of American showbiz to cannibalise and parody itself feels strained, though there are several good gags. The show's book was

written by Rupert Holmes — who readers of a certain age may remember for the Pina Colada song — after the death of Peter Stone, who originally conceived it. Perhaps you'll find something heroic in this snarky murder mystery musical.

Perhaps you want something other than panto or drama over the festive period. You could certainly do worse than this show. You could also certainly do better. ● *Until Jan 11 (0844 482 5120, curtainsmusical.com).*

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Acid attack victim tells of 'agony' as neighbour is jailed for 20 years

Julia Atherley

A CHILDCARE worker today said he felt "destroyed" after being left with horrific injuries from an acid attack by his next door neighbour.

Dean Smith, 36, suffered catastrophic burns over the left side of his body when Santokh Johal squirted him with 91 per cent sulphuric acid through the window of his home in Leyton. Mr Smith, who worked in a primary school's nursery and after-school club in Islington, had already called the police after Johal, 53, started swearing and threatening to stab him.

Paramedics and firefighters found Mr Smith in excruciating pain. They hosed him off in the shower before taking him to hospital where he had skin graft sur-



Disputes:

Santokh Johal squirted sulphuric acid through an open window and onto Dean Smith, right, in Leyton

in January. Johal was convicted of throwing a corrosive fluid with intent to burn, maim, disfigure or to do grievous bodily harm and jailed for 20 years at Snaresbrook crown court last week.

Mr Smith still has treatment at a specialist burns hospital in Essex. He said: "My skin, all over my left side, it's damaged... I've got one hand I can use, I can

agony. The skin on my legs is very sensitive. I can't lie down, I can't sit down sometimes... Sometimes my brother has to come here to move stuff around."

Mr Smith, a former rough sleeper, said he had been involved in disputes with Johal but added: "I never thought my neighbour next door would go to such an extreme length to hurt me."

CCTV footage shows the moment Mr Smith, still on the phone to police, opens his lounge window to let the call dispatcher hear Johal's ranting. Immediately, Johal picks up a white bottle and squirts it into the open window.

Mr Smith said he has been unable to return to work. "He's destroyed me, there's no way back from this... [but] hopefully I can start to rebuild whatever



Teenage boys charged over anti-Semitic attack on rabbi

John Dunne

TWO teenagers have been charged after an anti-Semitic attack on a senior rabbi in Stamford Hill.

Police released CCTV images of two suspects, and a pair of boys, aged 14 and 15, handed themselves in early this morning, officers said. The victim, 54, who has not been named, had travelled from Israel to attend a wedding and has since returned home.

He is said to have left Bobov Synagogue in Egerton Road and was walking along Clapton Common at 9.45pm on November 29 when he was allegedly subjected to anti-Semitic remarks and beaten.

The boys are due to appear at