

# Poetic drama hits bull's eye



**MESMERISING:** Jonathan Moore's delivery

## **2GRAVES**

Arts Theatre, London WC2, 0870 060 1742,  
until December 7

**A**T A TIME when the West End is bursting with new blockbuster musicals, a one-man verse drama about a darts feud seems an unlikely winner. Even more so when it is delivered by a burly bloke, who never budes from his seat throughout the 75-minute production and who sports black bicycle shorts and a hairstyle reminiscent of Nigel Planer in *The Young Ones*.

But Paul Sellar's blistering script and Jonathan Moore's virtuoso performance have you gripped from the moment Moore lowers himself into his chair and rasps out the words: "There's a poetry to justice."

In essence, *2Graves* appeals to everyone's love of a good yarn. Moore's character, Jack, is a son with a lust for revenge that would shame Hamlet. He pours out his tale in vivid, muscular verse and, as he does so, he draws us into a seedy underworld of crime.

Jack tells how his whole life changed in 1978, the night his dad - a petty criminal trying to go straight - pinned his hopes on winning the World Professional Darts Championship. But the match was rigged. Big Ron triumphed; Dad was shamed; his life fell to pieces. From then on, Jack's course in life was marked out - to punish those who had destroyed his dad.

He drags us with him into increasingly murkier waters, into East End pubs and betting shops, into race fixing, extortion and vicious tit-for-tat violence. And, as he gets further into the mire, Jack the lad gives way to a ruthless criminal. So the meaning of the play's title becomes clear, as he warns us at the end: "If you must go looking for revenge, dig two graves - one for yourself."

The story grips but it is the style that makes it: there's a joy in the way Sellar combines the formal rigours of verse with ripe, East End vernacular. It's a poetic ballad one minute, Ernie (*The Fastest Milkman*) the next.

And Moore's excellent performance, deftly directed by Yvonne McDevitt, keeps the pace and focus tight and, using language alone, transports us to a smoky pub, a reeking prison cell and to the frightened, piteous death of a racehorse. A bull's-eye.

**SARAH HEMMING**