

When the Rain Stops Falling

Venue: [Almeida Theatre](#)

Where: West End

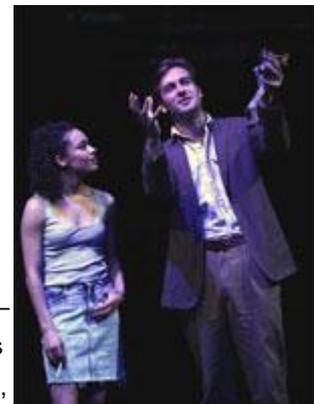
Date Reviewed: 22 May 2009

WOS Rating: ★★

Average Reader Rating: ★★★★★

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It takes a long time to work out who's who and what's what in Australian playwright [Andrew Bovell's](#) play at the Almeida, but you have two and a quarter uninterrupted hours to do so. It's neat and it's fairly enthralling, but I'm not exactly convinced the effort's worth it.



There's a hushed and dedicated atmosphere to [Michael Attenborough's](#) production – it's a little po-faced, and there aren't many laughs – which tracks family relationships across a time span of eighty years (1959-2039), through climate change in Australia, where there's a snow blizzard at Ayers Rock in the middle of the desert.

Bovell the award-winning film *Lantana* (based on one of his plays), a psychological mystery of failing marriages, and there's a similar dogged, forensic quality to this story, traced right back to child abuse, a car crash, an alcoholic mother, with constant references to Saturn devouring his children and the flooding in Bangladesh.

The ancestral echoes start with the actors arriving one by one with umbrellas and hanging their raincoats on hooks. [Phoebe Nicholls](#) and [Lisa Dillon](#) play older and younger versions of the mother of Gabriel ([Tom Mison](#)) who sires a son, also called Gabriel (an old man when the play starts, played by a befuddled [Richard Hope](#)) by his namesake Gabrielle ([Naomi Bentley](#)), a waitress in the Coorong district of Australia... who's now married to someone else called Joe ([Simon Burke](#)).

The link between London and the Land of Oz is forged when Henry Law ([Jonathan Cullen](#)), Gabriel's father, starts masturbating on trains and assaulting small boys in the park in 1968, the same year as Gabrielle's younger brother was abducted on a beach and – for what this is worth – the Soviet army invaded Czechoslovakia. Some sort of resolution is proposed when the son of Gabriel and Gabrielle, also called Gabriel, is visited by his son called Andrew ([Sargon Yelda](#)) in the last scene.

Top marks to the actors for sticking with all this, and to designer [Miriam Buether](#) and lighting designer Colin Grenfell for combining with Attenborough on such a beautifully presented Rubik cube of a drama. But this is one of those plays where the more information you receive the less you really feel you want it.

- Michael Coveney

