

Drama king

Throughout the theatrical firmament, stars come out for cult director Ivo van Hove. Don't miss the chance to catch his work on home turf.

text Mark Smith



In March, as part of the UK's National Theatre Live, Henrik Ibsen's classic play *Hedda Gabler* will be simulcast from London's South Bank into the art deco splendour of the Tuschinski cinema in Amsterdam. There's a strange

irony to this cultural transaction, for Ivo van Hove, the Belgian-born director at the helm of *Hedda*, is currently our foremost artistic export, juggling his role as director of the Toneelgroep Amsterdam repertory group with a bewildering array of top-flight engagements across the planet

Two years ago, Van Hove's terse take on *A View from the Bridge* – Arthur Miller's quintessential New York tale of a Brooklyn longshoreman gone awry – scooped two Tony awards, prompting the *Washington Post* to declare this decidedly un-American director 'Broadway's man of the moment'. This year, his majority-Dutch Toneelgroep Amsterdam will stage four different productions during a residency at the Barbican theatre in London. The first is March's six-hour Dutch-language amalgamation of Shakespeare's Roman tragedies – an immediate sell out. Theatrically speaking, Ivo van Hove can flog coals to Newcastle, then charge for them.

It helps that he's the name all the names want to work with. David Bowie entrusted him with the realisation of his parting gift to the world, the surreal musical *Lazarus*. Jude Law will come to Amsterdam's Royal Theater Carré in June to play

the lead in Van Hove's update of Luchino Visconti's *Obsession*, as part of the prestigious Holland Festival. Cate Blanchett is an ardent fan, and Ruth Wilson, star of HBO's *The Affair*, admits to having courted Van Hove for her title role in *Hedda*: 'He deconstructs a play like no one I know,' she explains. Indeed, Van Hove has cut *Hedda Gabler* adrift from its 19th-century Norwegian origins and set it to music by Joni Mitchell.

There have been whispers of dissent amid the countless ovations. In February, British playwright Sir David Hare's comments about European directors 'coming in and doing director's theatre where you camp up classic plays and you cut them and you prune them around,' were interpreted as a criticism of Van Hove's supposedly iconoclastic tendencies.

Still, the Belgian's fearless, internationalist instincts and his knack for divining oblique contemporary resonances in the unlikely texts continue to feel right at home in the bosom of the Stadschouwburg theatre on Amsterdam's Leidseplein. And now that the cult of Van Hove is on the verge of world domination, catching one of his surtitled productions – such as the acclaimed Shakespeare hybrid *Kings of War* – in the Mokum mothership will surely imbue the experience with extra satisfaction. It's like the suit that fits all the more perfectly because it was bought on Savile Row.

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HEDDA GABLER
9 March
Pathé Tuschinski

KINGS OF WAR
13 April (with subtitles)
Stadsschouwburg

