

## Medea review at Festival de Otono, Madrid – 'Simon Stone's electrifying reworking' \*\*\*\*\*



Marieke Heebink and Aus Greidanus Jr in the O2. Internationaal Theater Amsterdam production of Medea. Photo: Sanne Peper

Internationaal Theater Amsterdam – formerly Toneelgroep Amsterdam – has been a regular fixture at the Barbican in recent years. Ivo van Hove's Dutch ensemble has set London alight with radical revisions of classic texts, including Roman Histories and [Kings of War](#). Simon Stone's Medea, arriving at the Barbican in March, is as good as anything the company has brought to these shores before.

It's a really radical staging. In his groundbreaking production of [Yerma at the Young Vic](#), Stone encased Billie Piper inside a glass box. For this retelling of Euripides, originally crafted in 2014, he's done the opposite. Marieke Heebink's Medea is left to wander in a great, white infinity that stretches impossibly far in every direction. Much of the action is relayed via video camera onto a giant screen above the stage, in vintage Van Hove style.

Stone's take on the text is inspired by the story of Debora Green, an American doctor who burned down her family home during a difficult divorce in 1995. His Medea – actually renamed Anna, here – is a senior pharmaceutical scientist, recently released from a psychiatric unit after attempting to poison her unfaithful husband, Lucas.

This updating is superbly done; simultaneously authentic and accessible, it's still easily possible to make out the shape of Medea, themes intact, underneath Stone's rewrite, but his contemporary dialogue and the completely recognisable marital tug-of-war he constructs also makes the story feel thrillingly contemporary and relevant.

It's a trick Robert Icke has pulled multiple times, with *Oresteia* and [The Wild Duck](#), but Stone manages to squeeze it into 80 quicksilver, interval-free minutes. There are little in the way of directorial flourishes. A shower of black feathers here. A dousing in red paint there. But that's about it.

Stone prefers to focus on the acting, which is wise because this production is blessed with two monumental performances. Heebink, a mainstay with the Dutch company for nearly 25 years, won a Theo D'Or – the Dutch equivalent of an Olivier award – in 2015 for this role, and it's easy to see why. Her performance as Anna is almost painfully raw, almost unbearably vulnerable. A woman far more intelligent than those around her, yet somehow subordinate to their whims. A woman who had everything, reduced to nothing. Her terrible actions make terrible sense.

Opposite her, Aus Greidanus Jr is equally good as Lucas – the Jason figure. Looking like a svelte, sophisticated Jamie Oliver, he's so clearly a weak-chinned, second rate scientist compared to his wife, made all the more irritating by his desperation to prove otherwise.

This is world-class theatre. A first-rate adaptation, by a first-class director, powered by first-class performances. Exquisitely, brutally bold.

**The stage, Fergus Morgan, 20 November 2018**