

# Age of Rage review \*\*\*\*

“Four hours fly by”



The Internationaal Theater Amsterdam company in Age of Rage. Photo: Jan Versweyveld

## Ivo van Hove's thundering, propulsive mash-up of the Greek classics

Ivo van Hove is in mash-up mode once more. The director who first made a splash in the UK with a six-hour staging of Shakespeare's Roman Tragedies in 2009, returns to the Barbican with a condensed relentless fusion of six Greek tragedies.

Age of Rage deftly splices together Iphigenia in Aulis, The Trojan Women, Agamemnon, Orestes and Electra with a thundering percussive soundtrack. The family tree of the house of Atreus is projected on the wall, to allow the audience to keep track as we shuttle through scenes of slaughter and retribution, battle and sacrifice, while exposition is delivered via a death metal bellow played live and loud on stage by Brussels art-rock collective BI!ndman.

There's an argument to be made that Van Hove is at his best when working with the superb ITA ensemble and that's borne out here. The incomparable Hans Kesting makes a softly spoken, chillingly pragmatic Agamemnon. Janni Goslinga's Hecuba, the imprisoned Queen of Troy, glides around the stage in a wheelchair, regal and formidable. Ilke Paddenburg plays Iphigenia, the child sacrificed to the gods to further the war effort, as well as a chain of slain sons and daughters. This

double and sometimes triple casting amplifies the sense of circularity and repetition, violence begetting violence.

In place of the more usual sleek screens, designer Jan Versweyveld has constructed a kind of scaffold-cum-jungle-gym within which sit drums, wind machines and a bench grinder for the sharpening of knives. The chorus here is a group of dancers, choreographed by Wim Vandekeybus – of *Ultima Vez* – who twitch and judder to the thumping music. Each killing is performed ritualistically, almost tenderly, the bodies ascending to the heavens.

In the second half, the floor slides away to reveal a pit of mud. The performers fling it around; their clothes, their skin, gets coated in it. Everyone gets mucky. No one is left clean. Van Hove has always used splatter symbolically, liquid as a contaminant, and here that's dialled up. Blood and mud abound. Minne Koole and H  l  ne Devos play Orestes and Electra – exiled and alienated (one might argue radicalised), the product of their parents' bloody actions, united in their thirst for revenge. Devos, in particular and appropriately, is electric, full of the fury of youth.

Sometimes the production gets too nasty – Devos' penetration with a sword feels unnecessarily ugly even in the context of the show – but there's a grinding, cyclical grimness to the whole production, coupled with a dramatic propulsion. It inevitably reflects our times – war, societal division, endless mess – without ramming this home, while building to a kinetic potent whole, the almost-four hours flying by.