

Age of Rage - ★★★★★☆



'Age of Rage' tells the story of the fall of Troy © Jan Versweyveld

Age of Rage, from the Internationaal Theater Amsterdam, opens with what looks like a barbecue: as the audience take their seats, a man on stage is chopping hunks of meat and tossing them on to the flames. But look more closely and the familiar scene becomes horrific. It's clear that the torso he cleaves is human — a small human at that. This is Atreus of Greek mythology, evoking his grandfather's crime by serving up his brother's children to their father and so perpetuating a curse that will cascade down the generations and through the Trojan war.

In Ivo van Hove's production, that feast is also symbolic. This is a story in which children will be slaughtered again and again, a story peopled with desolate mothers, anguished fathers and vengeful sons and daughters. Like Punchdrunk's *The Burnt City*, it's inspired by the Greek tragedies of Euripides and Aeschylus and sees in the fall of Troy a template for the senseless brutality of war across the ages. But it's hugely different in tone: this is a blazing, harrowing piece of theatre, brilliant, raw and terrible.

We begin the story proper with Agamemnon (Hans Kesting, excellent), stranded in Aulis as he awaits a wind to sail his troops to Troy, agonised by the divine instruction he has received to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia. He will be the first of many to find a reason for atrocity — and that atrocity will breed new reasons for further brutality. The recurring patterns are highlighted by the fact that every child lost is embodied by Ilke Paddenburg, who plays Iphigenia. As they die, her slight form appears, projected dancing across a screen, the images multiplying with the slaughter.

The show has an epic, elemental quality, with Jan Versweyveld's starkly expressive design, Wim Vandekeybus's restless choreography and van Hove's searing stage images. But it's the moments of intimacy and grief that make it strike home, from the innocent glee with which Paddenburg's Iphigenia greets her father Agamemnon to the raw agony of Hecuba (Janni Goslinga) faced with the corpse of her son and the quiet descent of Astyanax's slowly falling body. Grimly good.