

A View from the Bridge

Young Vic, London SE1; until 7 June

The Belgian director Ivo van Hove has made his name with bold, experimental stage adaptations of films by major European auteurs – Bergman, Antonioni, Visconti – produced with his Amsterdam-based company, Toneelgroep. Here, in his first production for London's Young Vic, Van Hove turns his talent for reappraisal to Arthur Miller's claustrophobic 1955 tale of a Brooklyn longshoreman, Eddie Carbone, and his obsession with his niece, Catherine. The effect is startling.

The most daring decision taken by Van Hove and his designer, Jan Versweyveld, is to dispense with Miller's precise stage directions (this was a playwright whose notes to his actors and directors were often as poignant and exacting as his dialogue). The production opens not on a Red Hook tenement, but with a stark black box that lifts to reveal a bare thrust stage, bordered by a low Perspex wall.

This is the cage in which the inevitable tragedy – Miller himself described his play, inspired by a true story, as a "Greek drama" – will be played out. A boxing ring, even, in which two men must collide – as they do in one of the play's most powerful scenes, when Carbone (Mark Strong) challenges his rival, his wife's young cousin Rodolpho (Luke Norris), to a play-fight that quickly turns nasty.

Strong is outstanding as Carbone: deadened, defeated, thrumming with barely restrained aggression. "His eyes were like tunnels," the lawyer Alfieri (Michael Gould) says of Carbone – here, you believe



Phoebe Fox, Mark Strong and Nicola Walker in a 'viseral, vital' A View from the Bridge at the Young Vic. Tristram Kenton

it. And he is matched by an excellent cast – especially Nicola Walker as Carbone's frustrated wife, Beatrice; and Phoebe Fox as a brilliantly playful, naturalistic Catherine.

The power of the production lies in emphasising the play's universal qualities. Much is gained, but something is also lost. We have no sense of Brooklyn, or of the dockworkers' hardscrabble existence; and the period detail – records, stenography, Greta Garbo – sits a little uneasily against this new timeless setting. Tom Gibbons's sound, too – a wash of dramatic choral sequences, underpinned by a terrible pulse, like a ticking clock – ratchets up the tension, but sometimes risks overwhelming a story that is quite tense enough already.

But this remains a visceral, vital reinterpretation of a classic play, full of persuasive visual imagery that displays the singular sensibility of Van Hove and his team, and is bound to linger long in the memory. **Laura Barnett**

The Observer: New Review
13/04/14