

THEATRE

A View From the Bridge

Young Vic, London

★★★★☆

Ian Shuttleworth

Director Ivo van Hove professes to be uninterested in the overt good/evil conflicts at the heart of so many Arthur Miller dramas. This makes his staging strategy for this revival puzzling. Van Hove (whose previous visits to Britain with his own Toneelgroep Amsterdam included a version of Shakespeare's Roman tragedies with audience wandering around the stage and a blue-screen-matte-dominated presentation of a trilogy of Antonioni film adaptations) has stripped Miller's play of virtually all naturalism and presented it as the essence of inevitable tragedy.

In his first production with British actors, they perform in modern clothes but barefoot on a thrust stage empty but for two steps at the back and a low balustrade round the three audience sides. A constant soundscape runs in the background: a mechanical hum like an engine throbbing, a pulse which could be the ticking of a clock or the beating of a gallows drum. And Fauré's *Requiem*, more or less throughout the two hours. Lines are delivered, not oratorically, but with a palpable awareness of their status in the dramatic ritual as well as their ordinary heft. From the very beginning, there is no doubt that the events we see enacted will end tragically in the fullest sense of the word. It feels thoroughly Sophoclean.

Longshoreman Eddie Carbone's ill-suppressed desire for his teenage niece is immediately apparent, and apparent not just as any old tragic flaw but as a clear transgression which has already put Eddie on the inescapable road to perdition.

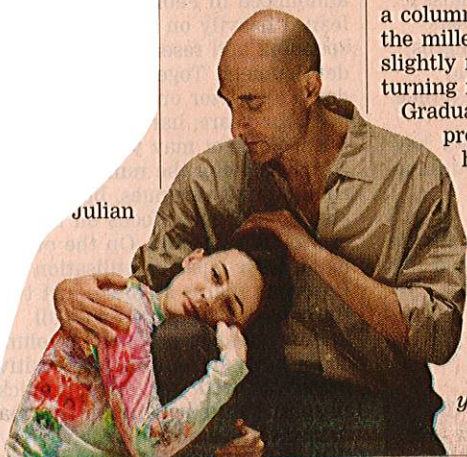
Mark Strong is more measured than the usual Eddie: instead of bellowing his thoughts, he announces them. Nicola Walker as his wife Beatrice is like a geographical feature, a column of granite worn down by the millennia to a single, slim, slightly misshapen but upright finger, turning from support to accusation.

Gradually this ceremonial approach proves persuasive. But then, having won your admiration, it washes it all away with a ludicrously over-the-top climax – a shower of blood, I ask you! – whose deliberate unsubtlety is a slap in the face for us as much as for Miller's moralising.

Sprawling: from left, Keith Bartlett, Lindsey Campbell and Diana Quick in 'The Big Meal'. Below: Phoebe Fox and Mark Strong in 'A View From the Bridge'

Simon Annand
Jan Versweyveld

Julian



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