



**Song From
Far Away**
Young Vic,
London
Until Sept 19
1hr 15mins



Eelco Smits
plays an
egotistical banker
plagued by guilt

When shallow, egotistic, 34-year-old New York-based banker Willem gets a phone call from his mother telling him his younger brother Pauli has dropped dead, he is irritated. It means he must go home, to Amsterdam, which he left 12 years ago.

When he gets there, he can't quite bear to stay with his parents, so he checks into a hotel, sends texts to an ex-lover and picks up a Brazilian bloke, all of which he reveals in candid, funny, tender, wonderfully vivid letters he finds himself writing to his dead brother. The words pour out: various characters' responses to his death, his

A One Man Showdown

father's devastating howls of despair, his sister's obsessive tidying up. Gradually Willem becomes more deeply reflective, baring his innermost soul. Rather too literally: he spends much of the play naked.

Simon Stephens's penetrating monologue is less about Willem's grief than his guilt. Director Ivo von Hove's stylised, exquisitely lit production (that features music from American singer-songwriter Mark Eitzel) puts Dutch actor Eelco Smits's Willem in a giant, empty cardboard

box – his hotel room – in which even his own shadow begins to haunt him like the song that he can't quite remember. He confesses that he doesn't know how to hug any more. And little by little his capacity to feel returns to him, along with the song.

He gently hugs his sister when he says goodbye. It's a marvellous, moving moment, spoilt by the final image, in which Willem stands on a windowsill, his arms outstretched. Embracing life, or death? Maddeningly ambiguous.

Georgina Brown