

London Lowdown What's On In The Capital

Flawless study of isolation

Theatre Review Antonioni Project ★★★★★

Familiarity with Italian film director Michelangelo Antonioni won't help you here. On the surreal stage of Dutch multimedia company Toneelgroep, his original 1960s Italian trilogy *L'Avventura*, *La Notte* and *L'Eclisse* presents the faintest of outlines. Familiar scenes are submerged in a waterfall of white balloons, a remembered pool is rendered in blue Styrofoam and there's a sprawling, climactic party to which the characters of all three movies are invited.

For a while, you're hard pressed to figure out not just what's going on but why. Why bundle three, masterful films together, on stage, in Dutch, then film it again, relaying the picture via live feed on vast screens? Why use such low-grade, ugly urban landscapes as pre-recorded backdrops? Why aren't you at home, actually, watching Antonioni in your pyjamas?

Before long, though, Ivo van Hove's astonishing ensemble silences every quibble. Flipping between the close-up of film and the wide-shot of theatre, we follow three couples across a vast stage: Lidia and Giovanni's ten-year, anaemic marriage; Vittoria, falling out of love with her fiancé and beginning an affair with a crass broker; and Claudia and Sandro, burying their love for Anna, Sandro's missing partner, in each other's guilty arms.

It's wistful and fragmented, technically explosive and breathtakingly intimate, an emotionally devastating portrait of isolation clumsily sutured by the promise of love. Toneelgroep delivers flawless performances in an unforgettable experience. Unmissable.

Lucy Powell

Until Sat, Barbican, 7.45pm, £16 to £32.

Tel: 0845 120 7550. Tube: Barbican/Moorgate



Breathtaking: Toneelgroep's Antonioni Project Picture: Jan Versweyeld

