

REVIEWS

Slings and arrows of outrageous technology

I TRAVELLED to Nottingham half expecting to be sent straight back home. *Elsinore* is the Robert Lepage *Hamlet* adaptation which failed to open the Edinburgh Festival when the set broke down. Watching this absorbing but curiously pointless exercise in theatrical technology, one readily understands why the production had to be cancelled. Without the high-tech wizardry there would be no show.

The basic trick, and it is no more than a trick, is a single piece of scenery. This is a basic flat with a rectangular gap in it, but, thanks to the stage machinery, it is capable of rising and falling, moving backwards and forwards and revolving through 360 degrees.

In this way, what you thought was the floor suddenly becomes a wall and, seconds later, it becomes the ceiling. Projections are used

to create different locations, and there's ingenious use of video; Lepage is able to address images of himself, sometimes moving, sometimes in freeze-frame.

You spend the whole show marvelling at this piece of equipment's ingenuity. At one moment Lepage seems to be the king in the middle of a playing card.

With costume and projection changes he transforms himself before our eyes from Hamlet into Claudius, and from Polonius into Ophelia. All the while he delivers chunks of the play in an expressionless, electronically treated voice.

There are some extraordinary *coups de théâtre*. During Hamlet's anguished scene with Gertrude, for instance, we seem to be watching from the point of view of Polonius,

hidden behind the arras. In the climactic duelling scene, Lepage is able to impersonate all the characters, with dextrous use of a double and videotape. Throughout, the action is accompanied by a trippily hypnotic score by Robert Caux.

The effect is strangely mesmerizing. *Elsinore* creates a vivid impression of a *Hamlet* that is

all taking place inside someone's head: that of a nerdish technology buff, probably, as he plays games on his personal computer.

But if you momentarily stop to think, close your eyes to prevent your mind being dazzled by theatrical sleight of hand, you realise that this is a perverse and ludicrous exercise.

Lepage, a man of the most beguiling and inventive imagination, doesn't actually

seem to have anything to say about *Hamlet*. As he delivers the great soliloquies with all the passion of a robot, you realise that this is the theatrical equivalent of a pop video, hip, clever and meaningless.

Are you moved by this *Hamlet*? No, you are not. Are you intellectually stimulated by it? Apart from wondering what surprise the technology is going to deliver next, not at all.

Elsinore, finally, is an elaborate exercise in failing to come to terms with Shakespeare's endlessly tantalising and elusive play.

But it has to be admitted that a failure by Robert Lepage is a good deal more interesting than most people's successes.

For information on tour and tickets call Barclay's Stage Partners: 0171 221 7883

CHARLES SPENCER

Theatre

Elsinore
Nottingham Playhouse

Elsinore Charles Spencer Telegraph



Clipped By:

ianharris

Sun, Feb 6, 2022