

THE RSC's new season has got off to a tremendous start with the morality play *Everyman*, first performed in about 1500.

It is directed by those admirable Theatre de Complicité veterans Kathryn Hunter and Marcello Magni, and their distinctive, at times grotesque, imagination is well suited to this antique play.

They have set their multi-racial, modern-dress production in a sun-baked peasant community. Dogs bark, cicadas chirrup and there is an inventive prologue, undreamt of by the play's anonymous author, in which we watch *Everyman* being bathed by a devoted servant before attending a riotous wedding, complete with rousing folk music.

Some might complain that the RSC has no right to take such liberties with a classic, rarely performed text, but I think the directors have been wise. If the play is to move an audience, it must be set in a recognisable world, and instead of coming across as a bland allegorical figure, Joseph Mydell's *Everyman* is a recognisable individual — a self-indulgent Jack-the-lad who fancies himself, and the pleasure of the flesh, something rotten.

But his pleasures are not to last. God, played with awesome Old Testament wrath by Paul Hamilton, has sickened of mankind's irreligious

## New life in an old play about Death

### Theatre

**Everyman**  
The Other Place,  
Stratford-upon-Avon

ways and sends Death to call *Everyman* to account. In this production Death is a stunning *femme fatale*, played with stirring sensuality by Josette Bushell-Mingo, who leads a *danse macabre* at the wedding, takes *Everyman* in her slinky embrace and reveals her true identity only after a passionate snog. Mydell's panicky terror at this unwelcome news is a wonder to behold.

The production is as strong on the spiritual as it is on the sexy and the comic. As *Everyman* is abandoned in his distress by the transient comforts of life — fellowship, worldly goods and family — Mydell movingly conveys *Everyman*'s lonely journey from craven terror to humble repentance.

I have some niggles. The presentation of *Strength, Beauty and the Five Wits* (senses) as a troupe of circus freaks, for instance, seems out of place in this more serious section of the play.

But the production achieves a fine sense of


solemnity and grace in its closing stages. In a lovely touch, Mydell returns to the zinc bath in which he began the play, only it has now become his coffin; and the final scene in which his soul awakes from the dead and he climbs up to heaven, to be enfolded in Christ's arms, like a *pietà* in reverse, is as beautiful as it is moving.

*Everyman*, with its ancient sense of ritual and repetition, not to mention the Christian certainties which will now seem obsolete to many, is a notably difficult play. There is no doubt, however, that this production succeeds in breathing new life into the neglected but still vivid text.


I will remember the evening as much for its religious profundity as for its fine sense of theatre.

*This review appeared in some editions of Saturday's paper. Tickets: 01789 295623*

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