



■ Matthew Marsh as Eugene de Kock and Noma Dumezweni as Pumla Godobo-Madikizela Picture: Robert Day

“She recognised he was completely in conflict with the things he had done and needed to find some way of coming to terms with that.”

During one conversation, de Kock said of a murder he committed: ‘I realise now a human being died that night’ – a statement that could refer to a kind of death for both victim and perpetrator.

Indoctrinated at an early age by his father into Afrikaner Nationalist ideology, he had always dreamed of serving in the military and became, says Mumby, “a soldier operating within a system that sanctioned his actions”.

“There’s a deep sense of anger and injustice that he became the scapegoat for the regime, incarcerated for life while his bosses walked away scot free.

“His trial was bad timing – before the TRC was set up where

if perpetrators told the truth and contributed to national reconciliation they were offered full immunity.

“De Kock’s superiors flocked to those hearings and purged themselves, mostly dropping him in it because he was already in prison.”

Wider relevance

The play’s concern with post-conflict trauma – whether for men like de Kock, self-confessedly “troubled by the souls of the people he killed”, or the victims whose harrowing evidence Gobodo-Madikizela has meticulously recorded – clearly has wider relevance to similar atrocities from Northern Ireland to Rwanda.

“Questions of whether Pumla can forgive either personally or as a representative of a people

run through the piece and there remains an ambiguity in it, a sense of the messiness of human beings.

“Ultimately it’s not just a localised story. There are victims and perpetrators of crimes in many cultures – Germany, Ireland, Israel.

“Trial and retribution isn’t necessarily the best way to deal with crimes of the past. The truth and reconciliation movement tries to learn lessons of the past, to heal and get on with life.

“No-one wants to live with fear, anger and guilt handed down through generations, but forgiveness is not about forgetting but about acknowledging, then being able to move on.”

■ *A Human Being Died That Night* runs at Hampstead Theatre downstairs until June 21.

Solid Miller is lacking darkness

ALL MY SONS
Regent’s Park Open Air Theatre
★★★☆☆

“It’s gonna rain tonight,” predicts protagonist Joe Keller. As one, the audience turned their gaze to a threatening sky.

Thankfully, we were spared a deluge, but it highlighted a problem with this venue. Arthur Miller’s masterful study of corrosive crime, deceit and guilt, in which past deeds cast long shadows, needs to feel unbearably oppressive.

As the noose tightens around the neck of Joe, whose wealth is the result of illicit wartime business, we should share his sense of inescapable doom. But the tension dissipates in the open air.

We’re too far removed from the actors, miked to compete with ambient noise. Instead of subtle performance shifts, we get histrionic music cues and the random appearance of extras. It’s a particularly solemn show and tell.

Tom Mannion overcompensates with his affected portrayal of Joe, gabbling lines at a high pitch, but Brid Brennan is magnetic

as Kate, doggedly clinging to the belief that their missing pilot son Larry is still alive. She’s haunting in her denial, then suddenly dangerous when her zealotry is threatened.

Charles Aitken captures the petulant frustration of Chris, the Kellers’ surviving son and Andy McKeane is effective as the architect of Joe’s downfall.

Vivacious Amy Nuttall brings unusual strength to Ann, Larry’s sweetheart, who’s transferred her affections to Chris, and daughter of Joe’s jailed ex-partner.

There’s comic relief from Matt Cross and Maddie Rice as brightly tactless neighbours, and Simon Wilson and Tilly Blackwood as a harassed doctor and caustic wife respectively.

Design boost

Timothy Sheader’s production gets a boost from Lizzie Clachan’s design, which contrasts a billboard of the perfect all-American family (including prominent Chekhov’s gun) with gnarled tree roots twisting down below.

This is a solid rendering, but never digs into those powerful primordial depths.

Until June 7.

Marianka Swain



■ Tom Mannion as Joe with Ewan Harris as Bert Picture: Tommy Ga-Ken Wan



■ James Marlowe as Liberty Valance and Oliver Lansley as Ransome Foster Picture: Jethro Compton Ltd

a man’s gotta do philosophy.

There are many moments of rich drama: the high-stakes game of dice between barman Jim and bad ‘un Valance had the

audience spellbound at the mood of menace and tension created by Lanre Malaolu and James Marlowe.

Niamh Walsh’s Hallie could

have been a hard role to pull off, but she steered an excellent line in avoiding cliché and instead offering conviction in her dilemma over her two

suitors. Other performances were spot on: Malaolu’s Jim with his shuffling, cowed gait was excellent; Paul Albertson’s Bert was caked in prairie dust and drenched in testosterone and James Marlowe’s psycho-philosopher Valance was terrifying.

The story was narrated in voice over by the wonderful Robert Vaughan, whose cowboy pedigree goes back to *The Magnificent Seven*. Production values, lighting and sound were of the usual high standard that we have come to expect at the Park.

One mystery was solved by the end of the play – who it was who shot Liberty Valance. The other remained unsolved: where on earth did Dorothy Johnson get the names for her characters? She also wrote *A Man Called Horse!*

Until June 22.

David Winskill

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