

Remake of fairytale is full of beans

JACK AND THE BEANSTALK
PARK THEATRE
★★★★☆

It's pantomime season and there's more than you might expect in Jez Bond and Mark Cameron's re-imagined Jack and the Beanstalk. This clever take on the traditional story, marries slapstick with all manner of meta-theatrical and literary japes. It's cleverly done: a freewheeling confection, overloaded but unfailingly exuberant.

With a running joke that the Park has simultaneously programmed Hamlet as part of its festive season, the actors start with a scene from the doomed prince only to be interrupted by a disgruntled 'audience member'. The cast re-assesses and then catapults the audience into the land of Gazoob where the evil inventor Ms Grimm wants world domination. Meanwhile, in the neighbouring Kingdom of Nowen, Tina [Tupperware consultant to the stars] and her son Jack struggle to make rent. Grimm's lovely daughter Grethel and her boyfriend Geoff – the smallest giant in the world - try their best to block



■ Jack and the Beanstalk

Picture: Ben Broomfield

Grimm's plans. When Grimm turns Geoff into a bean, only a band of singing mariachi shepherds can help save the day.

As well as Shakespeare, there are far-reaching references: TV soaps, Groucho Marx, classic poetry, to name a few; they come thick and fast. The versatile cast bound between sharp physical comedy routines [the slow-motion parodies of TV soap climaxes are particularly fine], do glorious un-PC impersonations of foreigners and belt out the

superb numbers. Michael Cahill is an inspiring Dame, all quivering vulnerability and innuendo in a fruit-presser costume [designed by Josephine Sundt]. But the text's excessive knowingness over-complicates the story and the riffs are often too obtuse. My young companion found it a little confusing. He did want to see it again though - especially for the chance of taking part in Tina's on-stage Tupperware competition.

Caroline David

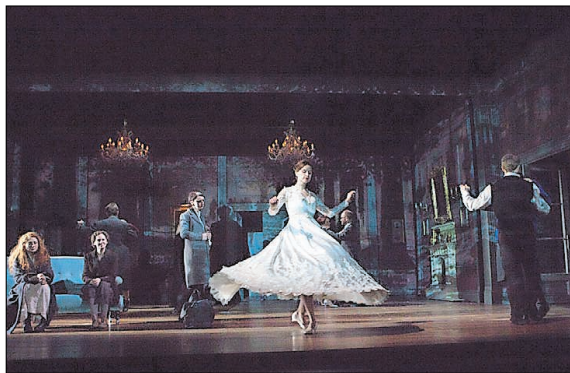
Crisp winters tale of family

3 WINTERS
NATIONAL THEATRE
★★★★☆

London-based Croatian writer Tena Štivić's National Theatre debut keeps it in the family, with 70 years of history refracted through one Zagreb house and one bloodline.

Ambitious, exquisitely constructed 3 Winters shifts seamlessly between three time periods: 1945, birth of Communist Yugoslavia, when fierce partisan Rose (Jo Herbert) appropriated part of the house where her mother (Josie Walker) was a maid; 1990, as civil war looms and Rose's family mourns her passing; and 2011, when independent Croatia negotiates EU membership, and the clan gathers for Lucia's (Sophie Rundle) wedding to a capitalist tycoon who's bought the property and evicted the other tenants.

There are several exposition dumps early on, but Štivić mostly trusts her audience to keep up – perusing the programme's potted history is a must. Howard Davies' crisp production serves the



■ The cast of 3 Winters

Picture: Ellie Kurtz

clarity and economy of her storytelling, with Tim Hatley's ingenious sliding screens easing us between time jumps, accompanied by film projections of harrowing recent events.

Štivić displays a real gift for balancing personal and political. Although a large cast necessarily means some are confined to snapshots, her characters are richly drawn and her dialogue sharp, funny and true to life. The present-day bickering relations are most engaging, including Siobhan Finneran's stoical matriarch, Lucy Black's troubled divorcée, Adrian Rawlins' speechifying

teacher, and the thematically effective warring sisters: liberal Alisa (Jodie McNeel) and pragmatic Lucia. Adrift aristocrat Karolina (Hermione Gulliford) and Susan Engel) provides a wistful note.

Unusually for an epic, female experience dominates. The women negotiate control of their destinies, balance security and principle, examine the legacy of war, and adapt to survive. The climactic twist is predictable, otherwise this is a terrifically impressive tale of family and nation with resonance for our own changing homeland.

Marianka Swain.

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