

Theatre: Frozen

Revived tale is still chillingly timely

"Someone said the other day it's very timely, but then I thought well isn't it always very timely? Isn't child abduction and child abuse always timely as long as it's still going on?"

Sally Grey highlights a sad truth as we discuss the Park Theatre's latest play, *Frozen*. Coming shortly after the awful case of Bristol's Becky Watts, this revival of Bryony Lavery's dark tale about the consequences of child murder is unfortunately as contemporary as it was when it stormed the National Theatre back in 2002.

Brought to the stage by Islington's Blueprint Theatre Company, the show is directed by Ian Brown and stars Grey alongside Mark Rose, Helen Schlesinger and Liam Timms.

It's certainly an emotionally draining project – while Grey plays Nancy, the grieving mother of a murdered 10-year-old, her (real-life) husband, Rose, plays serial killer, Ralph. Both talk to a psychiatrist (Schlesinger), each delivering devastating monologues as they come to terms with their situation and Nancy moves from desperation to eventual forgiveness.

"There is something going on today where people are beginning to look a bit more between good



■ Above: Van De Graaf from *Angels Fighting Devils*. Above right: Sally Grey

and evil," says Grey. "People are starting to realise that nothing is that simple and it's important to understand that otherwise it will just keep going on and on and on if you demonise people and say you're evil and that's that."

Of course losing your child – and in such brutal circumstances – is every parent's worst nightmare, and one that is very

hard to imagine unless it actually comes to pass. Grey says that taking on the role has changed her attitudes towards forgiveness – "does (Nancy) really forgive (Ralph) or does she just need to see him and tell him that she's forgiven him?" On a dramatic level, she's enjoyed the challenge.

"It took me a long time to tap into that complete loss and stress.

It has taken a while, but I'm an actor so I enjoy finding all that emotion, expressing it and looking at the big questions like can you find humour in grief as well? Certainly this character does and can and that's how she survives, by finding a strength and humour in her situation."

The theatre company has been pursuing the chance to perform

Frozen for years, having long been taken with Lavery's "incredible writing".

"The thing with Bryony is that all the characters are so rounded. I know that sounds a bit of a cliché but you could easily just have the mother as a victim, then the murderer's just this evil weirdo, but there are also moments where he can be very tender and gentle – it's up to the audience to decide how to respond to that."

In addition to the play, a corresponding art exhibition will also be showing throughout the run. Called *Angels Fighting Devils* (named after one of Ralph's tattoos), it sees local artists create a series of images on themes raised in the play such as protection, fear and violence, based on ideas given to them by children.

"It's quite nice that we've been able to give children a voice in this, because that's something that's often not done – which is understandable, they couldn't come and see (the show) – but I think it's important that children have as much of a voice as possible in this whole idea of what it means to be safe and understand where the danger is."

Alex Bellotti

■ *Frozen* runs at Park Theatre until April 17. Visit parktheatre.co.uk

Moody and modern Greek tragedy lacks emotional core

ANTIGONE BARBICAN

★★★★☆

The triumph of director Ivo van Hove's revolutionary *A View from the Bridge* raised expectations sky-high for its successor: Sophocles' enduring tragedy, starring French luminary Juliette Binoche.

Yet this *Antigone* is frustratingly less than the sum of its illustrious parts.

Van Hove claimed inspiration from incendiary recent events like the downing of flight MH17, but his moody modern-dress production isn't so much contemporary as a timeless void. It's a beautifully precise shell crucially lacking the molten core that gives this cerebral play its soul.

Canadian poet Anne Carson's translation, mixing lofty lyricism and resonant colloquialisms, strongly showcases the inexorable mutual destruction of two intransigent absolutists.

Antigone (Binoche) is determined to bury her brother against the wishes of Kreon (Patrick O'Kane), who decrees that, as the antagonist of a bloody civil war, his body must be left to rot.

Binoche has graceful presence, but van Hove's deliberately measured approach leaves her exposed.

Unable to find organic grounding for her emotional crescendo, she grows shrill and synthetic.

The real articulation of the war between duty to the state and to family and divine law comes from O'Kane's bullying technocrat, menacing in his deceptive moderation, and the superb Chorus, acting as both his political sounding board and fatally conflicted psyche.

In addition to choric duties, Kirsty Bushell provides a poised Ismene, Finbar Lynch an eloquent seer, and Samuel Edward-Cook a stirring Haimon.

Jan Versweyveld's set juxtaposes mundane and ethereal, its bland office backed by video-projected dreamscapes. The latter distract from the live action, and, along with muddled amplification, suggest an intimate piece at odds with the cavernous Barbican stage.

Van Hove's ponderous approach is oddly hypnotic, and underlines the importance of listening to others, but the austerity robs *Antigone* of its pathos.

Until March 28.

Marianka Swain



■ Juliette Binoche in *Antigone*

Picture: Jan Versweyveld