

# ETCETERA

REVIEW

## A financial thriller to get blood pumping

**LABYRINTH**  
HAMPSTEAD THEATRE  
★★★★☆

**B**eth Steel, returning to Hampstead after 2014's *Wonderland*, dips back into history for a resonant financial drama. It's 1978, and Wall Street is lending staggering sums to developing Latin American countries for infrastructure projects that are never completed – money instead lining the pockets of despots.

But when an oil crisis causes interest rates to skyrocket, Mexico – billions in debt – threatens to default. The IMF arranges a bailout, imposing strict austerity on the masses while protecting the elite, and the banks.

We're introduced to this hedonistic world via new trader John, who's seduced by its drugs, booze and sex-fueled excesses, and promise of untold wealth. Steel's meticulously researched piece explains everything from the bad debts "extend and pretend" approach to offshore tax dodging, conference deal-making, and the erroneous belief that a country can't go bankrupt.



■ Wall Street drama *Labyrinth*  
Picture: MANUEL HARLAN

There are modern parallels aplenty, but Steel doesn't trust us to find them – Greece gets a winking name-check. The heavy-handedness extends to John's fear that he's turning into his low-level fraudster father – both confidence tricksters gambling with people's life savings. It's a salient point, but too schematic.

If reminiscent of both *Wolf of Wall Street* and *Enron*, Anna Ledwich's kinetic production is paced like a blood-pumping thriller – expressive, stylish, hallucinatory. The neon grid of Andrew D. Edwards' sleek traverse set effectively projects John's interior struggles, lights

flickering alarmingly and the floor glowing a hellish red.

Sean Delaney is strong as neophyte John, less convincing as he grows more ruthless. There's good support from Philip Bird's deadbeat dad, Tom Weston Jones's sleazy, Mephistophelian mentor, Martin McDougall's Southern boss, Joseph Balderrama's Latin American head honchos, and Elena Saurel's journalist.

Ambitious but overlong, struggling to combine didactic history with satire, drama and morality play, but Steel's indictment of a toxic industry blazes through.

Marianka Swain

## Spellbinding storytelling of Selassie

**THE EMPEROR**  
YOUNG VIC  
★★★★☆

Colin Teevan has created an extraordinary showcase for the chameleon like Kathryn Hunter in this adaptation of Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuscinski's book about the fall of Haile Selassie, Emperor of Ethiopia, in 1974. Hunter embodies a dozen of Selassie's loyal flunkies, magically switching between them with just the removal of a hat or slump of the shoulders.

The worshipful loyalty of these courtiers is handled empathetically. While their roles are absurd – fluffing royal pillows, marking time with bows, cleaning the lapdog's urine off the shoes of visiting dignitaries – their pride in serving the ruler is oddly endearing.

Yet this is no rosy Downton-esque reminiscing: the emperor lives in luxury while millions starve. Grim footage from a



revealing Jonathan Dimbleby documentary shows the horrific cost of the "development without reform" policy – Selassie using international aid to build bridges in his name rather than modernising or alleviating suffering.

There are consequences, too, for these loyal servants living through another. When the Minister of Information's son rebels against the regime – one of several students enlightened by time abroad – he is sacrificed to secure Selassie's rule, a loss that weighs heavy. And when the coup finally comes, in a blast of chaotic sound (Paul Arditti) and strobe lighting (Mike Gunning), it

leaves these men with a yawning void in their lives. Hunter beautifully communicates that grief.

Her consummate skill is matched by that of krar-strumming musician Temesgen Zeleke, who conjures locations, provides effects, and becomes the voice of conscience. Director Walter Meierjohann (reuniting with his Kafka's Monkey team) wisely keeps the staging relatively stark and simple, drawing us into the spellbinding storytelling. A fascinating behind-the-scenes glimpse of absolute power, and a human take on a resonant history lesson.

Marianka Swain

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### Music at St Mary's

17<sup>TH</sup> & 19<sup>TH</sup> OF SEPTEMBER / 7.30PM  
ST. MARY'S PRIMROSE HILL, ELSWORTHY ROAD, LONDON, NW3 3DJ

17<sup>TH</sup> OF SEPTEMBER - 7.30PM

LIEDER RECITAL (INCLUDING LIEDERKREIS), OP 39 SCHUMANN, CONCERT ARIA K505, MOZART AND SONGS BY BRAHMS, RICHARD STRAUSS AND TCHAIKOWSKY.

PERFORMERS: MAYA BERLEC AND JONATHAN SUMMERS.

19<sup>TH</sup> OF SEPTEMBER - 7.30PM

MUSIC BY BACH (CIACONNA IN D MINOR), SCHUBERT ("SHEPHERD ON THE ROCK"), HAYDN (DUO VIOLIN, VIOLA), MOZART, BRAHMS, MENDELSSOHN, VAUGHAN WILLIAMS AND BLISS.

PERFORMERS: STEFANIE HEICHELHEIM (SOPRANO AND VIOLA), MAYA BERLEC (MEZZO-SOPRANO), BERND GRADWOHL (VIOLIN), ANTHONY PIKE (CLARINET), JONATHAN SUMMERS (PIANO).

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