

De kleine Eva

Royal Flemish Theatre,
Brussels

GABRIELLE O'NEILL

For its latest production the Royal Flemish Theatre (KVS) has headed to the suburb of Anderlecht, and a vast old workshop by some lonely railway arches. It is a suitably forbidding location for the tale unfolding inside.

De kleine Eva uit de Kromme Bijlstraat is based on a narrative poem by Louis-Paul Boon telling of the murder of an eight-year-old girl and the impact her death has on her community. The press descends, gossip is rife, a culprit must be found and suspicion alights on the local oddball.

It may sound like the stuff of modern news bulletins but Boon's work dates from 1956. This co-production between KVS and the Antwerp-based company MartHaltentatief emphasises the universal nature of this theme and the directors, Johan Petit and Bart Van Nuffelen, have succeeded in creating a piece of drama which retains the poetic rhythms of the original. Performed in Dutch, with French side-titles, *De kleine Eva* takes place on a set strewn with urban detritus.

The cast of six share out the roles of Eva, her family and the residents of the town. The three female actors – Katrien De Ruyscher, Kristine van Pellicom and Els Olaerts – are particularly strong, forming a Chorus of surmise and speculation which drives forward the drama.

This is an unsettling play – marked by the keening cry of a mother or the song of a child in mortal danger – and the presence of a bogeyman starts to loom over the production. Therefore some slapstick is welcome and the male actors oblige, playing the comedy policeman or slobby neighbour, bringing some levity to proceedings.

And although Boon's worldview is undoubtedly pessimistic there are life-affirming moments. It is being so interested in other people's doings, after all, which keeps us going.

★★★★☆ Tel +32 2 412 70 70

More on ft.com/arts: Al Murray, the Pub Landlord and Terence Rattigan's 'The Deep Blue Sea' both tour the UK