

Review: De Roovers BLUE REMEMBERED HILLS by Denis Potter
Greenwich+Docklands International Festival 2021

Chris Lilly • Sep 10, 2021

‘a thrilling, eerie experience, superbly produced and stunningly original’

★★★★

Flemish theatre group de Roovers are back at the Greenwich+Docklands International Festival with another signature staging of an English-language play in an extraordinary location. The audience arrives at Abbey Wood railway station, gets loaded into buses, and progresses out of the London it knows into weird, other-worldly landscapes on the Thames margins. The GDIF has done amazing work in getting a difficult site both accessible and comfortable – it is genuinely weird, but easy to sit and watch the show.

De Roovers have taken Denis Potter’s 40-year-old television play, that channelled Potter’s love and hate for his childhood in the Forest of Dean and made it odd by having very grown-up actors play 10-year-olds, and made it odder. Heavily accented English, strange staccato delivery, and above all, the location of the action, all adding to the dissonance, the feeling that you know what’s going on, but it doesn’t quite make sense.

In 2017 they put their distinctive stamp on Arthur Miller’s ‘A View from the Bridge’, this year it’s a treatment of Denis Potter, and in both cases the play is radically changed by the site of the performance. Their eye for making a London sunset into a glorious thing, to position audience and playing space so that nature and natural light make the action visually wonderful is truly impressive. A silhouetted shed at the top of a hill, a battery of well-located footlights, a very impressive sound design, and seven actors zooming up and down the hillside, building stuff out of sticks and rubbish, breaking stuff – when they specify a site, they really mean it, and they really make it work.

'A View from the Bridge' is burnt into my visual memory for its use of the Dockland office blocks as background. I know the images they generated with this piece will last as well. It's a thrilling, eerie experience, superbly produced, stunningly original, and very, very odd. The six-actor Flemish company who devised it, without a director, have an uncanny knack for making my city into a new, strange place, and I am really looking forward to wherever they take me next.

BLUE REMEMBERED HILLS

BY DENNIS POTTER, PRESENTED BY DE ROOVERS

Secret Location, Thamesmead Waterfront

Tuesday 7 - Saturday 11 September

90 minute

Box Office: <https://festival.org/whats-on/gdif-bluerememberedhills/>

CAST

PETER: STIJN VAN OPSTAL

DONALD: ROBBY CLEIREN

ANGELA: SOFIE SENTE

AUDREY: SARA DE BOSSCHERE

RAYMOND: WOUTER HENDRICKX

JOHN: NICO STURM

WILLY: LUC NUYENS

PRODUCTION/ADAPTATION: DE ROOVERS

SET DESIGN: STEF STESSEL

COSTUME DESIGN: KAREN DE WOLF

PYROTECHNICS: LIEVEN SLABBINCK/

DIVI-DIVI SPECIAL EFFECTS

BOBA

LIGHTING, FIRE SAFETY

PLAN AND PYROTECHNICS

EXECUTION: BERT VERMEULEN

MUSIC & SOUND EFFECTS: ERIC ENGELS

Reviewer: Chris Lilly read Drama at Hull University in the 70s, stage-managed a bit, spent 8 years as a community arts worker in Tower Hamlets, did the occasional tech job, then taught in East London and participated in shedloads of community theatre. Since retiring from teaching, he has acquired an MA in 'Theatre' from the University of Surrey and indulged a passion for live performance anywhere in London courtesy of his Freedom Pass.