

# Time Out

## 'Double Tongue'

### Old Red Lion Fringe

The Gate isn't the only place where east is going west. Head north to the Angel, and you'll hear the whirr of NATO helicopters over the Old Red Lion. Located mainly in the Hungarian town of Szeged, just across the border from Kosovo, Brian Woolland's politically charged new play is dominated by the air-strikes of April 1999.

Over in Eastern Europe from New York to research his theological PhD, Robert falls for Hungarian language teacher, Anna, whose British art-dealing partner James is doing a hot trade in icons for guns while bruising with the Russian mafia to indulge his taste for rent boys. Into the fray storms Serbian loose cannon Milan, fuming at the mouth

about America's pathological fear of a united Europe, and jealous of Robert's relationship with Anna. But it is Robert who is left whimpering and with blood on his hands: 'Shit! I didn't do it! What'll I tell my Dad?'

It doesn't take a genius to twig to the metaphors flying around here, but the characters are viscerally real and complex in this thought-provoking and potent piece. Woolland's roll-call of guilt and technical narrative devices could handle some fine-tuning, though. Kimie Nakano's morgue-like design, Marc Rosette's ecclesiastical lighting, smooth direction from Michael Walling and a barrage of committed performances (Krisztina Erdelyi's Anna is as luminescent as Serge Soric's Milan proves disturbing) all cry out for a larger space. *Sarah Adams*

Time Out, 27th June 2001

**Double Tongue** ▶ Sat. By Brian Woolland, directed by Michael Walling, presented by Border Crossings in association with the Hungarian Cultural Centre. 7.45pm. £10, £8 concs (not Fri & Sat).

Set mainly in the Hungarian town of Szeged, just across the border from Kosovo, Woolland's politically charged new play is dominated by the air-strikes of April 1999. Over in Eastern Europe from New York to research his PhD, Robert falls for Hungarian language teacher Anna, whose partner James is involved with the Russian mafia. Into the fray storm Serbian loose cannon Milan, enraged at America's pathological fear of a united Europe. The characters are viscerally real and complex in this thought-provoking and potent piece. Smooth direction from Walling and a barrage of committed performances cry out to be seen in a larger space.



Never mind the Balkans: 'Double Tongue' at the Old Red Lion. See FR listings

Time Out, 4th July 2001

## DOUBLE TONGUE - Old Red Lion

As the former Yugoslavia struggles through the tumultuous aftermath of 10 years of war and revolution; with the effects being felt throughout Europe, it is a timely moment for a play focused on these issues.

Brian Woolland's *Double Tongue* is set near the Serbian border in southern Hungary, in a place called Szeged and follows a young American student, Robert Lee, studying his PhD, looking at the changes of religion.

He goes on a language course and falls for the young, beautiful teacher, Anna Kovacs.

Together, they unwittingly become embroiled in antique smuggling and gun running, orchestrated by Anna's Eng-

lish boyfriend, James, and the sinister Serb, Milan.

Occasionally, fringe theatre is really outstanding and it is so here. The relationship between Robert and Anna works well, and the inner conflicts which both face are strongly brought to the fore.

Robert is played by Ben Pitts, who deftly captures the young American's pure, naivety, while Krisztina Erdelyi is excellent as the feisty yet insecure Anna.

Serge Soric as Milan is very powerful and scary, and his anger at the policies pursued by America and Nato is almost genuine in its ferocity and many of the political points that were raised had much significance.

The play also tackles religion in a most unusual fashion. James (Giles Foreman) is trying export an original

Black Madonna image, and he undergoes a conflict with an image of the Madonna, eerily played by Christopher Simpson, who also doubles as James' prostitute boyfriend. Sub-plots can often work against a play, yet on this occasion it fits in effortlessly.

Substantial sections of the play are performed in Hungarian and Serb, yet none of this detracts, it adds a greater sense of realism to the whole proceedings.

Video was cleverly interwoven with theatre in this innovative production; it has to be one of the most effective and thrilling plays around at moment.

JOEL TAYLOR

■ *Double Tongue*  
Old Red Lion

416 St John Street, EC1  
020 7837 7816 until July 7

Camden New Journal, 28th June 2001

## Theatre

### DOUBLE TONGUE: PEGASUS THEATRE

**B**rian Woolland, the author of *Double Tongue*, which was performed by the group Border Crossings at the Pegasus Theatre last week, has expressed the fear that "many people in England will be turned off by the play dealing with an issue". This does an injustice to the local audience who relished his work, and also begs the question as to what issue he had in mind.

*Double Tongue* is, after all, not short on issues. To start with, there is the familiar one of language. The play is rooted in a Hungarian language school, with a rather naive American student Robert (Ben Pitts) struggling with language tapes dealing with basic social situations, while Hungarian and Serbo-Croat are used freely throughout. Then there are a host of political issues. The action is set in Hungary in 1999 with Nato planes passing overhead, heading for former Yugoslavia. And, perhaps most importantly, there is the question of Serbian refugees.

The action of the play is as explosive as the international events against which it is set. Having fallen for his teacher Anna (a memorable performance from Hungarian-born Krisztina Erdélyi), Robert finds himself well out of his depth in his encounters with her boyfriend James (David Farnworth), a Serbian activist Milan (Serge Soric) and a male prostitute known simply as B (Arnie Hewitt) who also appears as the local Black Madonna icon. And if that wasn't enough, several of the



Comfort... *Double Tongue* from  
*Border Crossings*

characters have problems with their sexuality, which they attempt to work out in a pretty explicit way.

This heady mix is disturbing enough in itself. But equally unsettling are the parallels with the world three years on: American lost innocence, rumblings of war, partisan violence and the agony of refugees, to name but a few. If such themes can be said to be enjoyed, then this was a most enjoyable production. There are touches of humour, and many thought-provoking asides. But next time, Mr Woolland, one issue at a time perhaps?

Paula Clifford

Oxford Times

## The Stage

# Dead Man's Coat



Steven Anstee and Kristina Erdely in **Dead Man's Coat** at the Blue Elephant Theatre, Camberwell

As part of their successful Art in the Balkans season this new play by Hajdana Baletic tells an intimate tale of three people trying to rebuild their lives in post-war Serbia. Vera fears eviction until she can prove her fiancé has not been killed in action. Andrei arrives posing as her fiancé, a deceit which serves them both well but as the dust settles the future looks far from certain.

Classical in its construction, Baletic's tale is a poignant reminder of how the effects of war ripple on long after the cessation of hostilities. Vera clings to anything that offers her stability in her fragile world, from the dingy flat she calls home to an abusive relationship with her fiancé's murderer. She is the hostage victim who falls for her captor and yet her captor is also a victim and our sympathies lie with both of these young people. Kristina Erdely as Vera and Alan Marni as Andrei are perfectly cast and between them they colour the story with a humanity that might otherwise be lost. Playing the frustrated landlord is Steven Anstee, who besides his slightly comic touch, adds a political and social backdrop to the young couple's private struggle.

Paul Vale

Wednesday 23 November 2005 11:10 AM

# Arts in Southwark

## Dead Man's Coat

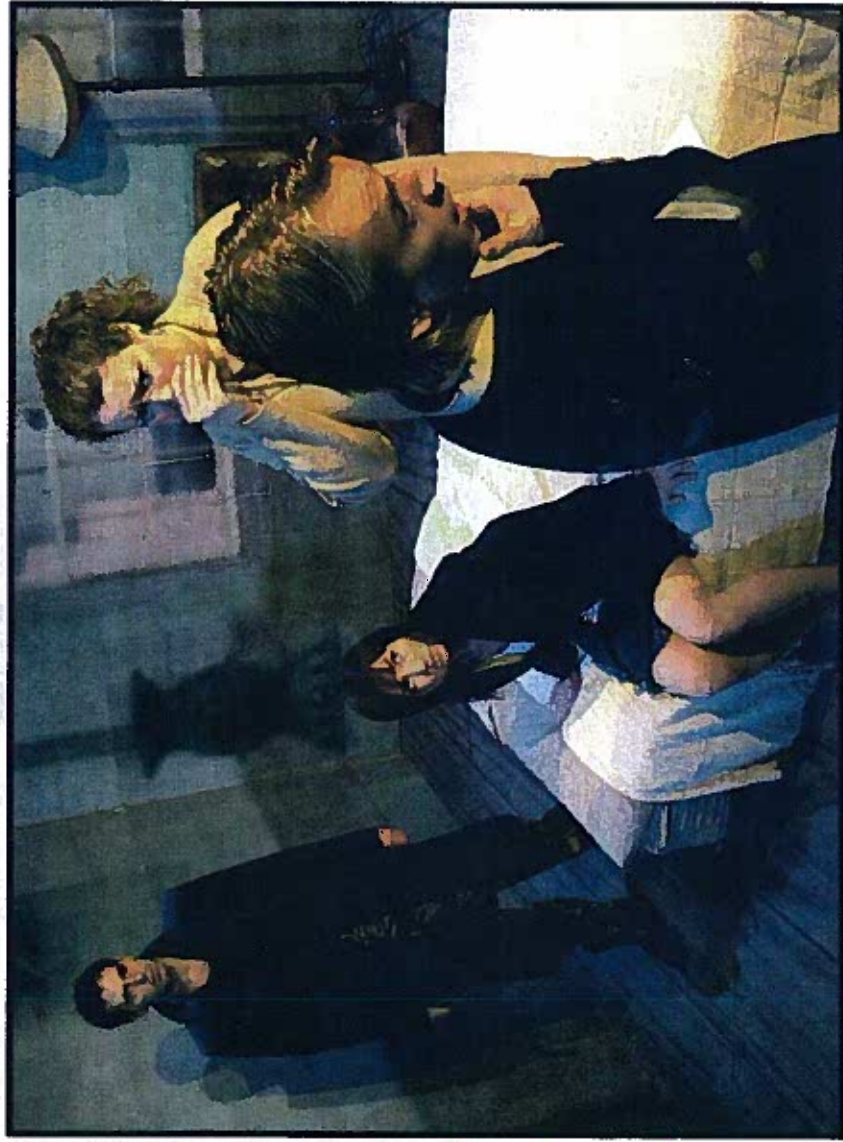
**HOW EASY** is it to put your life back together after living through a civil war? And how can you be sure of who you really are and what belongs to you, when so much around you has changed? *Dead Man's Coat* looks at these questions through the story of Vera, a young woman living alone in a single bedroom flat in the former Yugoslavia, writes *Tan Parsons*...

With her partner Jovan missing and presumed dead, Vera is faced with the threat of eviction, but just at the crucial moment, Jovan suddenly returns. However, he is not all he seems to be and Vera soon has to make an agonising decision.

Director Antonio Ribeiro's dark production is instantly captivating. The crackling dialogue between the two leads is tense and urgent, and the abrupt, visceral quasi-rape scenes are thoroughly unnerving. Kristina Erdely is excellent as Vera, giving a performance full of complexity and conveying superbly Vera's nail-biting habit of wavering between victim and complicit manipulator. Alan Marni makes a wonderfully restless, bullying Jovan, dominating the stage with his selfish, unpredictable behaviour. Together Erdely and Marni have a horrifying, macabre chemistry that draws you in and demands you watch in appalled anticipation, and this compelling relationship drives the play throughout.

Steven Anstee shines in a supporting role as the bumbling but determined Nenad. His ability to produce subtle but delightful comic touches adds depth to the whole performance, offering small moments of quiet human pondering and bafflement that punctuate the more explosive scenes.

Despite these gentler moments, the ultimately bleak atmosphere of the play is enhanced by Daniel Biro's superb soundtrack of stark, staccato piano chords and an eerie, uncomfortable 'brushing' noise like



intermittent rain on a rooftop. Visually too, this production is stunning. Although the story takes place in a small, shabby apartment, the set, designed by Mamoru Iriguchi, is beautifully crafted, with a blurred blue-grey backdrop that adds a distinctly dream-like quality to the piece. A genuine success, this haunting production will stay with you long after the final scene - don't miss the chance to see it.

Runs until December 3 at the Blue Elephant Theatre, Bethwin Road, Camberwell. Tickets £9.00 / £6.00 concessions. To book call 020 7701 0100 or visit [www.blueelephanttheatre.co.uk](http://www.blueelephanttheatre.co.uk)

## ***British Theatre Guide***

### ***4 Ever***

By George Iliopoulos  
The Theatre Lab Company  
Pleasance, London

Review by Lennie Varvarides (2005)

Once upon a time, there was a beautiful and successful couple, Adam and Eve, and their life was like one of those fairytales that ended with “and they lived happily ever after”...

The night is humid and the air still. In the distance there is a storm that is getting closer. The happy mood changes and the light banter turns sour. Emotions soar and the fairytale turn into a nightmare.

*4 Ever* is a new and passionate play by George Iliopoulos, (who won first prize for *4 Ever* in Greece's Competition for New Writers) which illustrates the dark and controlling side of love. In a very human and tragic way, the audience see themselves in the performers, and hide their faces. This is a stylised performance piece that is complemented extremely well by contemporary language. Metaphors are at a high in the detail of the set (Designer Malin Lindholm) where the outside and inside become ambiguous. The white window blinds of their hotel room transform into a suggestive cage leaving the audience very sceptical about the romanticism of love and thinking of marriage being similar to a life sentence.



The performers are on stage as the audience enters the space, lounging around their hotel room, playing in the sand and drinking and leading the audience into a false sense of security by their apparent appearance of happiness. We follow the journey (emotionally as well as chronologically, with the use of projection that the performers operate from stage) of Adam, the frustrated Architect, played with conviction by George Pirpasopoulos, and Eve, played by a versatile and powerful Kristina Erdely. There are associations and connotations with the classic Bible story but this version is closer to home.



*4 Ever* is produced by The Theatre Lab, a London based international company with a reputation for mesmerizing theatrical imagery, physical theatre, and devised experimental work. Words, music, images and movement are brought together to create dynamic theatre that crosses the boundaries of culture, language, taboo and medium. Directed by the Theatre Lab's Artistic Director, Anastasia Revi, whose unapologetic style, and constant pushing aesthetically as well as physically of the performers she works with, makes *4 Ever* a very strong visual production. All of which was enhanced with the poetic lighting, (Lighting Designer, Takis) and original music, (Composer, Jonathan Bratoeff). *4 Ever* is an excellent example of theatre working its magic as a collective of practitioners. In fact the only constructive criticism I have is that it is too well made, even the ending is wrapped up nicely.