



“Devastatingly romantic” love story takes centre stage

A French melodrama is taking centre stage at this year's Hostry Festival. Arts correspondent **Emma Knights** finds out more.



“A devastatingly romantic French love story” is the way director Stash Kirkbride describes the central play in this year's Hostry Festival.

The Eagle Has Two Heads will take to the Norwich festival's stage from October 23 to 28, and Mr Kirkbride said the production offered audiences a rare chance to see the melodrama by French playwright Jean Cocteau which was first performed in Paris in the 1940s.

“It is high drama. It hasn't been seen in Norfolk for 70 years, so it is definitely us resurrecting a long lost classic. We chose it because it's difficult, challenging, demanding, and also rewarding to stage as a play,” said Mr Kirkbride, the director of the show and artistic director of the Hostry Festival.

The show is set in Austria in about 1910 and sees a queen's would-be assassin fall hopelessly in love with her. The starting point for the production is an ambitious monologue by the queen, played by Tracey Catchpole.

“It starts with a 45 minute speech, with the queen talking to the ghost of her husband. It is an amazing piece of drama to watch,” said Mr Kirkbride.

“It is a really showstopping performance, the whole play opens up in those 45 minutes.”

Cocteau's drama continues with Stanislas the assassin - played by Adam Edwards - breaking into the queen's castle.

“He's come to kill her but within an hour he falls in love with her. He becomes the queen's official reader, and very soon the corridors of power echo disapproval and the unthinkable is considered by both lovers, leading to a very dramatic ending,” said Mr Kirkbride, who previously played Stanislas in a London production of the play about 25 years ago.

“It is above all a love story. It is a devastatingly romantic French love story by Jean Cocteau and a very rare chance to see a very large piece of theatre.”

Joining Ms Catchpole and Mr Edwards on stage in the cast are Peter Barrow, Lucy Monaghan, Christopher Neal and Tawa



Rehearsals for the play *The Eagle Has Two Heads* which is part of the 2017 Hostry Festival.

Pictures: MARK IVAN BENFIELD

Groombridge. Cellist Ivan McCready will perform the music, Amanda Greenway has created the actors' period costumes, and artist Gennadiy Ivanov has created a striking artwork which forms the centrepiece of the set.

“The set is very minimal but in

the background is this huge painting which is in a Cocteau style - a double headed eagle to represent the two lovers in the play,” said Mr Kirkbride.

The Eagle Has Two Heads is at Norwich Cathedral's Hostry from October 23 to 28. Tickets £15 (£12 concessions).

The festival is also holding a free screening of the 1948 film version of *The Eagle Has Two Heads* on October 25.

For more information about these and other Hostry Festival events, visit www.hostryfestival.org or call 01603 598676.