

"Lyn Gardner's top 10 theatre of 2015," Lyn Gardner, *The Guardian*, 17.12.2015.  
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## Lyn Gardner's top 10 theatre of 2015

### Theatre

Best culture 2015

**The Almeida's enthralling *Oresteia* is singled out by Lyn Gardner who, in no set order, chooses her other essential productions of the year.**



Lia Williams and Angus Wright in *Oresteia* by Aeschylus at the Almeida. Photograph: Tristram Kenton for the Guardian

### **1. *Oresteia* Almeida, London**

Some may have thought that adapter and director Robert Icke was taking a sledgehammer to Aeschylus's epic trilogy. No way. This revelatory and always enthralling evening was more delicate than that and painstakingly chiselled something new and utterly contemporary out of the ancient. Blowing away the cobwebs in decisive fashion, Icke's brilliant staging of a 2,500-year-old tragedy made it sing. We knew these people squabbling around the dinner table, every single one of them. How to do the right thing in a morally slippery world was the question at the heart of a production that, like so much of the best theatre this year, explored the nature of the stories that have been handed down to us. Women got a chance to take centre stage, and there was a prequel to the drama with a modern domestic setting that made it all the more heartbreaking. Never before has Agamemnon's decision to sacrifice his own daughter been explored with such clarity, nor have the consequences of that act unravelled with such a careering sense of tragedy.

Played out against Hildegard Bechtler's brilliant sliding door design, where what is revealed and what is hidden is under constant investigation, this was a production so artfully understated that, when the explosions of grief and rage came, they were all the more unbearable. There are scenes here I'll never forget, from Angus Wright's Agamemnon tenderly holding his daughter while she is clinically dispatched, to Lia Williams's Clytemnestra, felled by grief like a tree in a storm. At times it felt as if we were watching bleached ghosts, doomed to restlessly repeat these tragic events over and over again.

[Read the full review](#)

## **2. The Encounter**

**Edinburgh International Conference Centre**



'Worming inside your head' ... Simon McBurney. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod for the Guardian

Lots of theatre claims to be immersive, but Simon McBurney delivered the real thing. A deceptively simple solo storytelling show about a photographer lost in the Amazon jungle, it used binaural technology and headphones to make it feel as if it was worming its way right inside your head. The show's reliance on technology was contrasted with storytelling as an ancient form, in a work that fell somewhere between the unabashed intimacy of a bedtime story and the dislocating quality of a dream. [Read the full review](#)

## **3. A View from the Bridge**

**Wyndham's, London**



Mark Strong, centre, in *A View from the Bridge*. Photograph: Tristram Kenton for the Guardian  
All best-of-the-year lists are defined as much by what you haven't managed to see as what you have. Ivo van Hove's mighty dust-down of Arthur Miller's play made a number of best-ofs last year, but although I came late to the party, the West End transfer didn't disappoint. Mark Strong deservedly won awards for his performance as longshoreman Eddie Carbone, obsessed by his niece, while Van Hove's bleached-bone aesthetic magnified the play and gave it the reverberant, universal quality of a Greek tragedy. [Read the full review](#)

#### **4. Carmen Disruption** **Almeida, London**



'Despairing beauty' ... Viktoria Vizin and Jack Farthing in *Carmen Disruption* at the Almeida.  
Photograph: Marc Brenner

If I were picking a theatre of the year, it would undoubtedly be the Almeida, with one compelling show after another in *Oresteia*, *Medea* and then this radical reimagining of Bizet's *Carmen*, in which Carmen is both a rent boy and a globetrotting opera singer who only feels real when she's onstage. Messy, compelling and touched by a despairing, desperate beauty, Simon Stephens and Michael Longhurst's production was a fruitful act of cultural vandalism that excavated our lonely, fractured lives and dared British theatre to think again about how it handles familiar stories. [Read more](#)

#### **5. The Skriker** **Royal Exchange, Manchester**



Maxine Peake in *The Skriker* by Caryl Churchill. Photograph: Tristram Kenton for the Guardian  
Sarah Frankcom and Maxine Peake are shaping up as a significant collaborative partnership, and just how potent the two can be was demonstrated in this rare revival of Caryl Churchill's wild and dark fairytale, which now looks like a prescient warning about environmental catastrophe. Lizzie Clachan's extraordinary design transformed the Royal Exchange into a place that felt as if it was on the faultline between our world and something more magical and ancient. An evening that was weird, unsettling but also magnetic, with Peake utterly mesmerising as a shape-shifting malevolent fairy with a streak of vulnerability. [Read the full review](#)

## **6. Beasty Baby** **Polka, London**



*Beasty Baby* by Theatre-Rites and Polka Theatre. Photograph: Robert Workman

Who says that theatre for the very young can't be great art? Not me, and certainly not Theatre-Rites, who have been creating shows as good as anything made for adult audiences for more than 20 years. Designed for the very youngest members of the family, this gorgeous, inventive show delved with psychological acuity and playfulness into the disruptions wrought by the arrival of a new baby. The puppetry was terrific and it was a multilayered show with something to offer the under-fives but also parents and grandparents. [Read the full review](#)

## **7. Victor** **Old Market, Brighton**



'Utterly fascinating' ... *Victor* by Campo, starring the young Viktor Caudron and Steven Michel.

Photograph: Phile Deprez

What do we see when we gaze at a man and a teenage boy being physically close? The brilliance of this duet created by theatre-maker Peter Seynaeve and choreographer Jan Martens for the Belgian company Campo was that you never knew quite what you were witnessing. It's a piece in which muscle and tenderness, maturity and innocence meet and melt into each other with mesmerising intimacy. Is it a father and son? A grown man meeting his childhood self, or the child confronting the man he will become? It's the ambiguities that made this so endlessly unsettling and utterly fascinating.

#### **8. Pink Mist Bristol Old Vic**



'Vibrant energy' ... Phil Dunster in Pink Mist at Bristol Old Vic.

Sometimes a piece of theatre is so emotionally raw that it's hard to endure. That was the case with Owen Sheers's brawny dramatic poem about three raw army recruits who are sent to Afghanistan, and the mothers, wives and girlfriends they leave behind. The show began life on Radio 4, but you wouldn't know it from John Retallack and George Mann's spare production. Text, movement and sound came together with vibrant energy. This will deservedly be seen at Bristol Old Vic and London's Bush theatre early next year. [Read the full review](#)

#### **9. Rebecca Royal and Derngate, Northampton**



'Good and bad girls' ... Imogen Sage and Tristan Sturrock in Rebecca. Photograph: Steve Tanner

Emma Rice and Kneehigh went deep into the unconscious for the adaptation of Daphne du Maurier's study in jealousy: a brilliant piece of popular theatre that worried away at the dreamy dark heart of the novel, but also took impish comic delight in the 1930s setting. On one hand, it was all smoky gothic romance, and on the other an investigation into good and bad girls, in which the second Mrs de Winter became a mouse who roars with real passion. Read the full review

**10. Lela & Co**  
**Royal Court Upstairs, London**



'Shimmering truth' ... Katie West in Lela & Co. Photograph: Tristram Kenton for the Guardian

There are some stories that seem so overfamiliar that we have our ears and eyes wide shut to them. Lela's brutal narrative of how she was sold into abuse, her body a battlefield over which men fought and bartered, could be one of those stories. But Cordelia Lynn's text and Jude Christian's production worked so slyly together, that even as the production plunged us into complete blackout, it made us see the truth shimmering in the darkness, and confront our own complicity. Read the full review