

THE INDEPENDENT

Lost Highway, Young Vic, London

By Edward Seckerson
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The shiny blacktop of a road to nowhere bisects the Young Vic auditorium – at one end an automobile frozen in transit, at the other the Lost Highway to David Lynch's skewed imagination. Olga Neuwirth's amazing take on Lynch's cult movie pretty much achieves the impossible: it takes all the trappings of a great cinematic imagination – one built from the psychotic irrationalities of our dream state – and makes startling music theatre of them.

Wander into the Young Vic for any one of the six sold-out performances and you'll find a living, breathing, hyperventilating evocation of Lynch's inner world. The great thing about Lost Highway – ENO's first collaborative show with the Young Vic – is that it refuses to conform to preconceived notions about music theatre; it isn't governed by rules as to when or where it might be appropriate to speak or sing. Indeed, characters never really sing in this piece – they intone. There's a sleazeball called Mr Eddy, also known as Dick Laurent (every character in Lynch tends to have a double identity), brilliantly played by David Moss, whose menace is conveyed entirely in grotesque exclamations somewhere between sing-song and scream.

The dialogue itself is hyper-amplified to take on the allusion of a movie soundtrack, while the band (under Baldur Brönnimann) create an extraordinary kind of emotional static – the musique concrète of Hades – that has absorbed the myriad musics of Lynch's world, from popular songs like "Unforgettable" to Kurt Weill's Threepenny Opera.

Director Diane Paulus does a stunning job. Her designers turn the Young Vic into a neon-lit installation: four giant video screens filtering both live and pre-filmed images around a suspended Plexiglas box from which descends a white spiral staircase – the stairway to and from psychosis, mission control for Lynch's weird and wonderful imaginings.

So why does jazz musician Fred Madison (Mark Bonnar) turn into garage mechanic Peter Dayton (Quirijn de Lang)? Is Renee really Alice (Valérie MacCarthy) or Alice really Renee? Who's shooting the video of Fred and Renee having sex? Who kills her? Is Lynch taking the piss? Welcome to this "psychogenic fugue"; if you're a Lynch fan you've been here before – but never quite like this.

To 11 April (020-7922 2922)