

NEXT STOP,
MANHATTAN
BRIEF ENCOUNTER'S
HANNAH YELLAND
AND TRISTRAN
STURROCK,
PHOTOGRAPHED
IN COSTUME IN
COVENT GARDEN.



CLASSIC TWIST

FALL THEATER TAKES A FRESH APPROACH TO ICONIC WORKS. BY ADAM GREEN.

Buttoned-up passion and suffering in the name of duty are as English as room-temperature gin and tonics, and no movie has captured the romance of self-sacrifice quite like David Lean's three-hankie 1945 masterpiece **Brief Encounter**. This month, Kneehigh Theatre brings its cheeky, rapturous take on the film to Broadway, with Tristran Sturrock and Hannah Yelland as star-crossed suburbanites who meet in a train station

and fall in love only to return to their respective spouses. In this version, characters magically step out of black-and-white film clips into living color, sing Noël Coward songs, and swing from chandeliers, showing us the swoon beneath the starch. "In Britain, the film is almost part of our DNA," says the director, Emma Rice. "My passion is for the tender human emotions at its core and how to reimagine it for a twenty-first-century audience."

The experimental New York theater company Elevator Repair Service didn't so much set out to reimagine

PEOPLE ARE TALKING ABOUT THEATER

The Great Gatsby as to, in the words of company member Scott Shepherd, "just read the book from start to finish onstage and see if we could make a viable theater experience out of that." The result is the six-hour-long **Gatz**, at the Public Theater, in which actors playing workers in a dingy office become characters from Fitzgerald's Jazz Age elegy for the American Dream. As the narrator, Nick Carraway, Shepherd has to do most of the heavy lifting, and along the way he has managed to memorize the entire book. "No matter how familiar you think you are with something," he observes, "you can always find something new in it."

In another marathon-length staging of a magnum opus, the Pulitzer-winning **Angels in America** kicks off the Signature Theatre Company's Tony Kushner season with its first major New York revival. Set in Reagan-era Manhattan (not to mention Antarctica and Heaven) at the height of the AIDS epidemic, Kushner's astonishing "Gay Fantasia on National Themes" was, in many ways, the defining theatrical event of the nineties. The director, Michael Greif (*Rent; Next to Normal*), has assembled the likes of Zoe Kazan, Zachary Quinto, Christian Borle, and Billy Porter to bring an epic whose characters include Roy Cohn, the ghost of Ethel Rosenberg, and an apartment-wrecking angel to a new generation. "Tony's ability to synthesize so many themes, characters, and stories and wrap them in breathtaking theatricality

is timeless," Greif says. "And the end of the play, which talks about the need for equal rights, is still very much a beating-heart issue."

Finally, there's **La Bête**, David Hirson's faux-Molière comedy that, after flopping on Broadway in 1991, returns this month for a second shot. Set in seventeenth-century France and written in rhyming couplets, it concerns the battle between a high-minded playwright-actor and a buffoonish street performer for the heart (and purse) of a royal patron. This time around, Matthew Warchus (*God of Carnage; The Norman Conquests*) directs a sterling cast that includes David Hyde Pierce and *Absolutely Fabulous*'s Joanna Lumley. But the show pony of this production is the brilliant Mark Rylance (last seen here giving a Tony-winning turn in *Boeing-Boeing*) as the titular beast, Valere. Looking like a cross between Puss in Boots and a debauched Doug Henning, he brays, belches, and breaks wind through a 25-minute monologue that brings vulgarity, self-regard, and stupidity to dizzying comic heights. "Mark has a gift for seamlessly intertwining rigorous psychological truth with a vaudevillian bravura that can be quite shameless," Warchus says. Rylance adds, "I don't think I'm a particularly funny person in real life, and I'm terrible at jokes. So I think most of the humor comes out of my almost childlike pleasure in playing a character who, even though he's a talentless idiot, manages to believe that he's Orson Welles." □ *pata* >584