

FINANCIAL TIMES

9 janvier 2017

***Karamazov*, Théâtre Gérard-Philipe, Paris — ‘Ambitious’
Dostoyevsky’s world comes to life in this adaptation of his monumental
novel**

By : Laura Cappelle



'Karamazov', directed by Jean Bellorini © Pascal Victor/ArtComArt

The Théâtre Gérard-Philipe is having a very Russian season. This autumn, the Berliner Ensemble appeared on its stage with Nikolai Erdman’s Soviet-era *The Suicide*, and 2017 brings more Russian literature to suburban Saint-Denis: Dostoyevsky, Chekhov and Anna Akhmatova are all on the programme.

The most ambitious production on the list may be *Karamazov*, an adaptation of Dostoyevsky’s monumental last novel, staged by the TGP’s own director, Jean Bellorini. Indeed, he admits as much in a self-deprecating prologue to the action: a narrator figure, Khokhlakova (Camille de la Guillonnière), appears to clarify the plot, “for the two or three here who haven’t read the book”.

The production’s concern with clarity is laudable throughout. The complexity of the novel and the running time — nearly five hours — demand it; the fact that Bellorini has whittled down *The Brothers Karamazov* to a reasonably paced play is a feat in itself, and he gives the characters’ complex motives ample space to resonate.

The members of the Karamazov family are vividly contrasted. Jacques Hadjaje revels in the brazen irresponsibility of the father, Fyodor Pavlovitch, who all but abandoned his three sons, as well as one illegitimate child. Their different moral standpoints on issues such as faith and reason, which lend the novel its philosophical thread, are given due weight: Geoffroy Rondeau, as the rationalist Ivan Fyodorovitch, performs thrillingly in the long scene devoted to the poem he famously recounts to his brother Alexey, “The Grand Inquisitor”.

The parricide at the heart of the novel, and the false accusation of Dmitry Fyodorovitch, the eldest son, are deftly handled, despite a couple of weaker acting performances. Bellorini also explores subplots such as Alexey's relationship with a group of schoolboys and the death of one, Ilyusha. The production ultimately benefits: the interplay between the more intimate scenes and the sweep of Dostoyevsky's spiritual investigation rings entirely, movingly true.

The production also pays tribute to Dostoyevsky's world: the sets, two train tracks in front of a small house, skilfully evoke the modest railway stations that dot the Russian countryside. The French translation of the text, by André Markowicz, also aptly renders Dostoyevsky's quirks and variety of tones. Markowicz has done much to improve French readers' understanding of Russian literature in the past couple of decades, and returns to the TGP on January 14-15 to read Akhmatova's *"Requiem"*.

To January 29, theatregerardphilipe.com