

THE



TIMES

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SOUVENIR EDITION

**Edinburgh
Theatre
Puppet. The
Book of
Splendour**
Summerhall
★★★★☆
Mephisto Waltz
Assembly Roxy
★★★★★

Russia and Poland each maintain venerable traditions of image-led physical theatre, many examples of which are strewn across this year's festival. The Poles are presenting several large-scale outdoor productions in the Old College Quad, with indoor work at Summerhall alongside several art installations. Alternatively you could spend all day at Assembly Roxy's Russian season, starting with children's theatre mid-morning and climaxing with what for me is the first great show of the 2012 Fringe.

Last year Pawel Passini's neTTTheatre made a splash with a mind-blowing, award-winning multimedia take on Puccini's *Turandot*. Now he's back with

a strikingly designed performance inspired by Tadeusz Kantor, the renowned director, and delving into one of the key texts of the Jewish mysticism known as kabbalah.

Puppet. The Book of Splendour is quite an achievement. Passini, on technical duty, introduces the show with disarming irony via voiceover. Among the memorable set-pieces are three angels in white Afros singing on the sidelines in the style of Philip Glass, a child in a gigantic Jewish fur hat astride the back of a satanic dog and a chorus line of dwarves. The scope of themes — faith, art, knowledge — is impressive, Passini's ingenious grandeur in a cramped space commendable and the nearly dozen-strong cast seems prepared to do anything. But this dense,

many-layered piece needs pruning. There's too much (subtitled) text. I left feeling bludgeoned by esoteric speechifying.

Mephisto Waltz is a genius piece of work by Anton Adasinsky whose company, Derevo, founded in Russia but based in Dresden, is regarded by some as a Fringe legend. Here he's at his best orchestrating a hallucinatory, elemental journey into madness, violence, evil and spiritual redemption utilising Butoh-like expressionist dance, dark clowning and wonderful props (including a globe of the Earth that turns out to be a watermelon that is eventually gutted).

As a director, Adasinsky understands how hungry audiences are for more than surface beauty. Although he

receives excellent support from four equally shaven-headed minions, it's his extraordinarily protean performance in this vivid, messy yet masterfully disciplined piece that merits a fifth star.

Gaunt but muscular, Adasinsky is Nosferatu and the Devil, animalistic newborn and mud-bathed Bacchus, Caliban as emperor-general, tormented martyr and happily crucified scarecrow all in one. His switches between menace, pathos, comedy and sheer charm are sharp, dazzling and like being given gifts.

Donald Hutera
Puppet. The Book of Splendour
(0131-510 0022) to Aug 13.
Mephisto Waltz (0131-623 3030) to Aug 27