

Blood will have blood

Theatre

Molora, at The Oxford Playhouse, from Tuesday, June 12 to Saturday, June 16

IN an astonishing transformation, the Oxford Playhouse was reconfigured from a proscenium arch theatre into an intimate studio space for the production of *Molora* last week.

Director Yael Farber now has a strong relationship with the Playhouse and it must have taken some convincing to radically alter the staging. And what a change it makes. Although audience numbers are fewer, those that are lucky to have tickets gain considerably in intensity of experience.

Molora, meaning 'ash', is a re-imagining of *The Oresteia*, working as an allegory of contemporary South Africa. Klytemnestra (an awesome performance by Dorothy Ann Gould, projecting simultaneously great love and affection, and deep loathing and fear) is brought to trial at something resembling the Truth and Reconciliation Committee.

A huge microphone is scraped along a wooden table as she recites how she murdered her husband, Agamemnon. It is a crime of passion, as well as a carefully planned axe-job against a man who slew her first husband, her unborn child and then sacrificed one of their three children in a war ritual. By revealing her past, the state could move towards some element of forgiveness.

Her accuser in court is her daughter Elektra (Jabulile Tshabalala, last seen in Oxford in Farber's landmark *Amajuba*, and, like her character, electrifying). Elektra is blood-hungry for revenge against her mother, and convinces her athletic brother Orestes (Sandile Matsheni) to join her in her plot.

Their momentum is hurried along by a literal chorus, the Ngqoko Cultural Group who sing, dance, chant and play a wide range of musical instruments. It is as if WOMAD has come early: scary ceremonies are accompanied by the 'whoomp whoomp' of some sort of drum-box; war dances are a howl of drumming and shakers. There are some gorgeous mini-bows with whistles for more reflective moments.

At times stylised, the immense grandeur of the music and sound effects, and the terror of re-played torture scenes inflicted on Elektra by a gum-booted, whip-waving Klytemnestra, is overpowering.

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