

British Theatre Guide

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Mengele

Philip Wharam & Tim Marriott

Smokescreen Productions

Assembly George Square Theatre

2–26 August 2018



Dragging himself choking from the surf into the presence of a curiously garbed young girl, Josef Mengele—the chief camp physician of Auschwitz, mass murderer and "Angel of Death"—finds himself in a strange dreamlike purgatory, trying to justify his life and actions.

Performed in three distinct acts, *Mengele* takes itself rather seriously, which befits the subject matter, although Tim Merriott, who adapted the piece from Philip Wharam's novel *Right to Live*, portrays Mengele as a very human doctor, at first secretive and afraid then later cheerful and charming, before allowing his prideful boasting and arrogance to paint a complete portrait of an all too human monster.

While Stefanie Rossi performs the part of the enigmatic stranger, older than her years in wisdom and insight, she's given less to do and feels more like a facilitator, prodding and coaxing from Mengele the next link in the chains that will sink him.

It's also a multimedia piece and, while I understand fully the decision to use both real photographs and film of Auschwitz as well as footage from *Schindler's List* to bookend the acts, it's a curious choice at one point to "borrow" part of Roy Batty's "Tears in Rain" soliloquy from the 1982 film *Blade Runner*.

It's unclear if Marriott included the line because thematically the sentiment fits, while there are also clear parallels that could be drawn between Mengele, Batty's existence as an engineered "perfect human" and even the disgraced knight Tannhäuser, as Wagner is another common reference. Or it could simply be because it's a line that sounds good, and frankly, it's most likely that will be how most audiences will receive it, with a clanging thud that pulls them out of the scene entirely.

Still, it's a powerhouse of a performance and, although we're never in any real doubt of how it will end, it's a satisfying and terrifying look into the heart of human cruelty and the masks of self deception which it wears.

Reviewer: [Graeme Strachan](#)