

March 29, 2009

The Overcoat at the Lyric, Hammersmith W6

John Peter

This hauntingly and recklessly brilliant show should be subtitled *A Fantasy on a Theme by Nikolai Gogol*. Gecko — and their artistic director, Amit Lahav — have created a 70-minute piece of thrilling and sinister surrealist nightmare. Lahav plays Akaky Akakievich, Gogol's shabby clerk, who longs for a new overcoat as if it were his salvation. Akakievich is a Faust of the civil service, persecuted by himself, restless, frightened and hopeful, a sexual flop, a hermit longing for both company and privacy. This is not merely a Russian nightmare: it's delivered in Italian, French, English, Hungarian, Cantonese and Spanish. Akakievich is all mankind. "Give me your soul," says the tall figure in perfect Hungarian, yet looking like a Tibetan llama, "and you can have everything." Ti Green's set is a sophisticated clerical inferno that also serves as bedroom and sinister city. James Farncombe's lighting is like paintings by Odilon Redon or de Chirico come to life. Can't wait for Gecko's *Crime and Punishment*.