

## The Great Theatre of the World

Arcola

★★

William Gaskill's production of this 17th-century Spanish mystery play works well aesthetically. Jon Bausor's design is sparse but beautiful: shimmering costumes are winched on stage from the darkness; a papier-mâché solar system lights up on

demand; the actors' skeleton suits are simultaneously creepy and humorous.

Unfortunately, then, that the production as a whole is not such a delight. Adrian Mitchell's adaptation retains the rhyming verse of the original



MARK ELLIDGE

### in The Hothouse

Spanish and, for the most part, the cast rise to the challenge of making this text sound natural. Aoife McMahon, as the Beggar, is particularly moving. Andrew Dickson's simple, psalm-inspired melodies — with Joseph Attenborough's skilful on-stage guitar accompaniment — add another layer, but sweet songs and some good performances cannot make up for the fact that this play is all moral and no plot. The Creation myth as theatrical production, with God as director, the world as stage manager and human beings as actors, is an interesting idea, and provides the opportunity for several amusing, if self-indulgent, jokes, but Gaskill doesn't ask enough questions to make such a period-specific piece work. JC

**Robert Hewison, Bridget Galton and Jo Caird**