

Unsung @ Summerhall

A masterful central performance by Valentijn Dhaenens anchors a compelling, contemporary story of political hubris



In *Unsung*, Belgian actor Valentijn Dhaenens plays an unnamed politician on the campaign trail. What ideology, party or even country he's operating in is not entirely clear. If you're the type of person to use the word 'centrist' then he certainly seems like one, but the show doesn't make it clear. Good decision – it doesn't matter, and to pin any colours to this show's mast would only hurt its point. Dhaenens is playing the kind of ambitious, self-loving careerist you'll find in any political persuasion, and he plays him with lip-licking relish. When politicians start to believe their own hype, when mediocre men dismiss their own failings because they believe they are uniquely capable of turning things around, this is what they turn into.

The set makes this clear, gradually unfurling into a colossal image of Dhaenens' immaculately groomed face. Judicious use of voiceover and video immerse us in the politician's world, and the moments of theatricality are well-judged and powerful – when things go wrong, they do so to the tune of 'Flight of the Valkyries'. Dhaenens is a sublime performer, expertly portraying a man whose defining characteristic is his reluctance to be truly seen. It's a textured, layered performance of the highest quality.

You could project any number of real political stories onto this show if you wanted to (Blair and Brown, perhaps) but to do so isn't the point. This is the game of politics that plays out over and over again, and though the players may change and the results aren't predictable, something has embedded itself in our system that is refusing to be rooted out. A campaign slogan Dhaenens' character pitches, rejected by his handlers, is 'Our Politics Are Sick'. His mistake is not recognising that he's no cure – he's just another symptom.

[Unsung](#), Summerhall (Main Hall), 1-26 Aug (not 6, 13, 20), 12pm, £10-12

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