Theatre review: Crime and Punishment, Lyceum Theatre (****)

For anyone unfamiliar with Dostoevsky's original novel, the thing about *Crime and Punishment* is that there's not a huge amount of crime — nor, indeed, a great deal of punishment. What there is, though, is quite a lot of philosophical mulling-over of poverty, politics, morality, freedom and many more big issues besides.

Thankfully, though, in Chris Hannan's clear-sighted stage adaptation that's at the Lyceum until 9 November, all those issues come across with laser-like clarity — and, more importantly, with a strong sense of urgency. We really care about the killer Raskolnikov's intellectual musings behind his horrific act, and about his background in the startling poverty of 19th-century St Petersburg.

All of which is conveyed with striking freshness in Dominic Hill's fast-paced and vivid production. Set on a bare stage, with a bizarre collection of musical instruments, makeshift doors and anachronistic hanging light fittings to all sides, it slickly assembles whatever's needed for each scene before whizzing efficiently on to the next.

 Likewise, Hill brings out vivid performances in his very strong cast — each richly characterised but stopping short of parody. Adam Best is mesmerising — and seldom off stage — in the all-important central role of Raskolnikov, a simmering bundle of energy and nerves held together by an intellectual obsessiveness that seems close to madness.

Cate Hamer straddles several parts with ease, care-worn as Raskolnikov's mother Pulkheria and enjoyably smutty as the prostitute Darya. And George Costigan is a study in oily charm as the smiling detective Porfiry Petrovich, who's got the measure of the killer from the start.

As a stage adaptation that rethinks things from the ground up in convincingly dramatic terms, it's a spectacular success — as it is equally as a strikingly fresh, bold vision of theatrical possibilities.

[Crime and Punishment](#) continues at the **[Lyceum Theatre](#)**, Edinburgh, until 9 November 2013