

The Flying Inkpot Theatre Reviews 14.03.2008

aKabi and kOke

From the comments afterwards in the foyer, this was a performance that split the audience - you either thought it was extraordinary or "very boring" as I heard several people say. Personally I embraced this concept-based production and enjoyed the surreal beauty and the suspension of time that the dancers created while exploring the possibilities of balance. Hovering always on the edge of falling in their enormous platform shoes, they fluctuated between appearing as trapped hybrid individuals with grotesque appendages, playful animalistic creatures and drop outs from Monty Python's legendary "Bureau of Silly Walks".

The opening scene set the tone of the performance. Four performers squatted in silence as the lights slowly revealed individual faces staring into space. They then slowly started to tip into positions that would be impossible to sustain without the support of the platform shoes. Thus began a detailed examination of the spatial possibilities within these restraints and I found these quiet, slow movements hypnotic. A new movement occurred when a barefoot dancer suspended herself on the shoes of another and their ensuing duet created a harmony of counterpoint that looked like she was floating through space, her arms drifting out as though she was reaching for something that was beyond her grasp. This use of floating arms was incorporated throughout the dance and the ethereal effect that this created was strangely at odds with the heavy weight of the shoes that anchored the dancers to the ground. On other occasions the dancers lay back on the shoes and repeated similar soft reaching movements with the arms before rising again to shuffle awkwardly or fall in and out of balance. Towards the end of the choreography, two dancers balanced on the point of their shoes on one leg - it was quite mesmerising to see if they would actually be able to stay upright and not fall. There were a few duets but overall the focus was on individual struggles rather than group interaction with the performers seldom looking at each other.

The performance was flawless and the dancers never lost their focus or their balance. If there had been one wobble it simply would not have worked as this would have brought these alienated, hybrid beings down to too human a level.

Dance has always had an obsession with shoes and through history it has been the shoe, as much as anything else that defines the dance. Think about classical ballet's pointe shoes, Broadway tap shoes, hip hop sneakers, Spanish dancing shoes or the barefoot modern dance of Isadora Duncan and Martha Graham - these shoes have all contributed to creating a unique genre, expanding or limiting the possibilities of creativity within each form.

aKabi explores a new direction but certainly not one that will spark a new trend. Still, the architectural manipulation of the body was mesmerising to watch - the way the dancers teetered, crawled, shuffled and languidly rested on the enormous, inescapable burden of the giant shoes - as the forms they created were accentuated by simple, body-revealing costumes, stark lighting and silence that was occasionally punctuated by a minimalist soundscape. Overall, a performance that challenged both the dancers and the audience.