

Kunstenfestivaldesarts 2010

Dateline: 25th May, 2010

Tres Scripturae Étienne Guilloteau/Action Scénique With Claire Croizé and Claire Godsmark

Tres Scripturae is a beautifully crafted and unpretentious experimental piece choreographed by Etienne Guilloteau for Action Scénique as part of ongoing research. It starts from an elementary premise, the title referring to three different types of 'writings' at work in the piece: the choreographic, the musical and the stage writing (set and lighting). These three aspects of performance interact in proximity to an audience to create a world separate from the mundane, a space where the imagination is free. Like love, interpretation is in the eye of the beholder, and meaning is determined by the images triggered by personal memories as the elements intersect to boost expressivity. As a concept, it is almost self-explanatory; in execution it is enchanting.

Onto a bare stage lit by the neon worklights, Guilloteau steps centre stage and performs a smooth and inelaborate sequence of movements, mostly with the arms, the body seeming to follow through effortlessly and uncoloured by personal expression. On one side he is flanked by composer Alain Franco at a grand piano, on the other by lighting designer Hans Meijer at a formica-topped table with sound board and laptop; upstage an inner-stage area has been sectioned off by curtains draped inconspicuously in storage mode, hanging from very visible bars. Croizé and Godsmark await their cue along the bare brick walls of La Raffinerie's performance space. This all seems rather mundane, as if we have wandered into a rehearsal.

Guilloteau moves upstage and repeats the movements several times increasingly in interaction with this perfunctory inner stage and we already start to discern changes, perhaps only in our own perceptions, perhaps, also, in the dancer's muscular tension in an environment of heightened theatricality. This is the beginning of a trajectory, discreet at first, through which the movements will be amplified and complexity will steadily emerge, building to a dramatic climax before fading into twirling shadows on the back brick wall.

This dramatic sweep is achieved through the visible interaction of the three 'writings': footlights throw limbs and swaying bodies into sharper relief; Meijer moves around onstage re-draping, raising and lowering the curtains by manipulating ropes, adding the sumptuous texture of black velvet to the lighting and the dancers' bodies; Croizé and Godsmark augment the movement sequences, and the music heightens the pacing until an overhead wash floods the stage, bathing the dancers in a resplendent dramatic glow. The simple austerity of the opening sequence has been subtly magnified and intensified and finally transformed into a climactic moment of intricate, rhythmical dynamics, ornamented with the spectator's imagination. It's so cleverly manipulated, as layer upon layer is added or removed in complete but unobtrusive transparency, it's almost sublime.

The three 'writings' all share an equal part as the action swells into a total composition and the success of the piece is in large measure due to the satisfaction one feels at the unification of the various elements and a growing sense of wholeness. Guilloteau and his dancers exhibit the ways in which simple movements can open out through the composition, evolving into a multitude of complex sequences pushing the body further into a dynamic relationship with space, music, setting and lighting. The body becomes an expressive medium evoking sensibilities we interpret as the theatricality enhances our analytical capacity and emotional engagement. Even the flush on the dancers skin, the glow of perspiration on their bodies, as the movement reaches a crescendo, seem to enhance the dramatic element.

With his beard and shoulder-length curly hair, Étienne Guilloteau looks like a member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. That, of course, is an image gleaned from my own personal memories, but the piece is structured to include imaginative freedom. This is one of those occasions where concept and execution combine seamlessly.

Jackie Fletcher