

Peeping Tom: Triptych – London International Mime Festival – Barbican Centre

Reviewer: Jane Darcy

The Reviews Hub - London

February 3, 2023

Directors: Gabriela Carrizo and Franck Chartier

As part of the final London International Mime Festival, Olivier-Award winning dance theatre innovators Peeping Tom return to the Barbican for the UK premiere of their new show, *Triptych*.

Triptych is a fabulous, energetic and mysterious work, comprised of three linked pieces, The Missing Door, The Lost Room and The Hidden Floor, all set in different parts of an ocean liner. Together they demonstrate afresh Peeping Tom's extraordinary imaginative range and sheer physicality. One dancer will manoeuvre another as if that partner is made of rubber, twisted into extraordinary shapes, or left frozen, bent backwards on the stage. Other partnerships involve a body, rigid as a mannequin, lifted aloft without so much as a shiver of movement. For brief moments, bodies become so strangely contorted, they seem like inhuman figures from some hellish painting by Hieronymus Bosch. Most compelling are the ensemble pieces which are breathtaking in their complexity and vitality.

The sound design by Raphaëlle Latini is powerfully chilling. Often we hear the deep, ominous rumbling of the liner's engines, but there are strange electrical sounds, exquisite passages of music and furious bursts of thunder.

The Missing Door is largely witty. We're in an elegant saloon of the liner. A body, apparently dead, is unceremoniously hauled off stage by a waiter who proceeds to scrub blood off the floor while another man sits seemingly lifeless in a chair. It feels as if we're watching a cosy murder mystery. The scenes grow increasingly surreal – doors not only open, but bend. A large mirror becomes a window in which, in one dazzling scene, we glimpse seated train passengers being whisked backwards. Human instability is exaggerated. Men are turned to jelly, unable to control their movements. A woman finds herself unable to walk on her high

heels, her ankles bending and collapsing. At another moment, she is all control. Left in a chair, one leg extended elegantly over her head, she moves in time to the sinister opening and closing of a creaking door.

Towards the end of the piece – it's not easy to detect when one piece has ended and another begins – the scene seems to return to the original one. What exactly has been happening throughout remains a mystery, but the ride has been tremendous.

The second piece, *The Lost Room*, is perhaps the most engaging of the three. A maid makes up the bed in an elegant cabin. Flowers are brought in. We keep expecting guests to arrive. But when they do, it is in comic fashion. A clothes closet reopens to expose a whole pile of human bodies that tumble out onto the floor. The bed becomes a sinister breathing mound, like something out of Edgar Allan Poe. One lover appears, only to merge into another. Squawks come from a strange bird-like head, its body belonging to someone else. We are suddenly in the depths of some uncanny underworld.

Ensemble moments are often brilliant. There's a repeated shock as, with a thunderous roar, an outer door bursts open, and everyone in the room is violently blasted back, falling and tumbling unstoppably. Equally brilliant is a scene between two lovers, whose acrobatic coupling is at first beautiful. But when the maid, stripped down to her underwear by the blast, is seen trapped outside the balcony window, we are made aware that we are voyeurs. To intensify this sense that we are all peeping Toms, there are repeated references to this being a cinematographic work. Huge lights are manoeuvred into place and the set itself is clearly an artificial construction.

In the third piece, *The Hidden Floor*, the mood is far bleaker. The liner has sunk. We hear great gulps of watery sound and interiors take on the dilapidation of a ship wreck. The floor is flooded, the dancers splashing through it, sometime in joy, but more often in desperation. More and more, the darkened scenes take on the appearance of paintings. One intense piece of ensemble work sees near-naked bodies stretched out, clinging for dear life like the figures in Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa*.

Triptych is an intense, often mesmerising work. But there are moments of frustration when what appear as storylines refuse to resolve. The repeated device of having one scene melt surreally into another can have a distancing effect. It can be hard to see any overall shape, as was evident when the audience had to be prompted to applaud each piece as we simply didn't know when it had ended.

Source: https://www.thereviewshub.com/peeping-tom-triptych-london-international-mime-festival-barbican-centre/?fbclid=IwAR29YblxItSsVnKTGaDv28aEtacC_e-FSUofzEondnAfa42qqB70_i3c1pM