

## Review Dublin Theatre Festival

### ONE SONG: HISTOIRE(S) DU THÉÂTRE IV

O'Reilly Theatre, Belvedere College

★★★★★

The stage before it starts is like a giant installation. Bleachers, a climbing frame topped with a keyboard, a scattered drum kit, a gymnast's beam, racks of clay tiles with random words, a double bass on its side, benches and paraphernalia. It's busy and chaotic, much like life.

It starts with preparation and a sense of expectation as five athletes warm up and fans gather on the bleachers. A commentator mumbles excitedly but unintelligibly through a crackly megaphone, and an unlikely cheerleader arrives, complete with twirly white dress and fancy pom-poms, receding hairline and moustache. Already this feels like a whole heap of fun.

But it's also interwoven with grief. (Much like life.) The single song that forms the entire show, over and over, is printed on our cards: "Run for your life/ till you die/ till I die/ till we all die . . . Grief is like a rock in your head/ it's hard/ it's rough/ it's just always there . . . All we need is/ that it finds its way/ the earth beneath your feet/ day after day after day after day."

The athlete-band singing this are all furiously multitasking: the violinist stalks the gymnast beam, the singer belts it out as he runs on a treadmill, the prone double-bass player's rapid sit-ups lift him to play, the drummer races frantically from drum kit to drum, the keyboard player leaps from a jumping board to reach notes on the keyboard climbing frame. The supremely fit musician-athletes perform the song over and over, faster and faster, then sometimes slow to almost stop. They are egged on by the equally frantic fans, gesticulating, cheering, dancing, roaring, stamping. The action doesn't pause from beginning to end of this frenzied, repetitious, energetic loop.

One Song, created and directed by the Belgian theatremaker Miet Warlop, is a feat of endurance and an act of hope, of lifting each other up in a physical marathon that is surreal, absurd and very entertaining. So while it is hooked around the grief that stays with us (Warlop's brother died some years ago) it is also life-affirming, a paean to the



■ Dublin Theatre Festival: One Song

power of others to raise us and to the nature of life and community relentlessly moving forward, bringing us with it.

The song is punctuated (much like life) by interruptions: a ping-pong machine spews balls at the lead singer, who bats them back into the audience (the entire audience is like one enormous grin at the shared fun); large drops of water fall, eventually pooling and forcing a clean-up.

The twirling, chanting cheerleader rearranges the random words. The announcer continues unabated and unheard. A metronome measures out the madness. It builds to a crescendo of noise and exhaustion and cartoonlike madness. The cast (including Warlop, on the bleachers) is superlative.

The metaphor of life's ebb and flow, building and dying back, is made flesh in Warlop's exhilarating and raucous meditation on grief, and life.