

Tanja Liedtke's Twelfth Floor

Empire Theatre, Eden Court, Inverness, 17 February 2009



Amelia McQueen and Kristina Chan in *Twelfth Floor*

Visceral, comically entertaining and intensely thought provoking, *Twelfth Floor* presents a powerful and engaging vision of confinement.

Featuring five dancers from Australian Dance Theatre and DV8 Physical Theatre, this is an intricately constructed, complex and challenging work – physically demanding of the dancers and emotionally demanding of the audience.

It is refreshing and truly inspirational to see a contemporary dance production in which design, sound and choreography have evolved in unison and where the body is allowed to speak. The physicality of this production is part of its integrity; dance remains the primary agent of expression throughout, a principle ironically overlooked by many contemporary dance companies working collaboratively with multimedia.

Human interactions in an institutionalised space of confinement are beautifully observed and performed with athleticism, virtuosity and courage by the entire company. Throughout the production movement shifts continuously between polarities of vulnerability and violence, taking us deeper into the characters and also into ourselves.

Imaginative lighting and set design by Gus MacDonald and Gaele Mellis and an evocative soundscape by DJ Tr!p are an integral part of the production, maintaining focus on the human body as a powerful and universal medium of expression. The choreography is tightly woven yet retains a feeling of vibrancy and immediacy, passionately centred by the energy and care that have gone into exploration of each character and the relationships between them.

Superb use of shadow and the characteristic glare of Australian light illuminate the stage both within the design and the choreography. This is a creative vision grounded in reality and with an unflinching gaze. A revolving door and backlit doorway are used to brilliant effect, rotating and framing sequences of movement.

The door ajar, through which we witness both comedy and horror, is a source of escape and illumination. There are sequences of disturbing violation and incredible beauty written on the body, conveyed with strength and sensitivity by the dancers in an intense reflection of humanity.

Kristina Chan's performance as the "new arrival" was a mesmerising combination of obsessive, finely tuned micro movements and expansive, lyrical grace. Watching the character's movements unfold from the core of her being as the performance progressed was deeply moving, and her duets with Julian Crotti were nothing short of poetry. The pairing of these two characters was inspired, connecting two disparate souls in a tracery of chalk, one following the other, joined in their separateness.

Amelia McQueen's "nurse" was an intense study in stilted precision and authority. Her incredibly detailed movements distilled the essence of a character easily identifiable in many scenes from everyday life. The nature of the choreography where "the pathway between positions is as important as form" creates an image of perfection in terms of characterisation and artistic discipline.

This authoritative figure with her obsessive erasing of the expression of others and need for control, also contains a core of vulnerability, her behaviour and neurosis a symptom of her unease. The character could so easily have been depicted as pantomime but danced against type reveals a more empathic vision.

As a communicative piece of theatre, *Twelfth Floor* is a profoundly physical, multilayered work defined by rich characterisation and a potent dynamic of "affection and hostility", qualities Liedtke described as great physical premises for dance." Winner of the Outstanding Choreography and Outstanding Female Dancer (for Kristina Chan) categories in the Australian Dance Awards 2006, Tanja Liedtke (who was tragically killed in a road accident in 2007) was a remarkable talent.

Her ability to inspire both audiences and artists clearly lives on in this production, performed by dancers from the original cast. Led by Creative Coordinator Solon Ulbrich, *Twelfth Floor* will continue its tour to venues throughout England in March, providing a unique opportunity for UK audiences to see an extraordinary production.

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