

the stereview

Negative Space – Contact Theatre Viewed 3 March 2016

Review from Kenny:

Internationally acclaimed Anglo-Belgian Performance Company Reckless Sleepers bring their touring production of 'Negative Space' to Contact Theatre.

We enter the space to see the Negative Space in front of us. A wooden frame lined with plasterboard. The space is occupied by the performers, observing us, watching us, and preparing to perform.

The stage then becomes a blank canvas. Occupied only by one man, one woman and one chair. Then the performers begin to explore the space. They come through the floor, walk through the walls and from the ceiling space. The narrative throughout is one of slapstick, dark humour, love, relationships. There are fantastic moments of intense physicality and a beautiful moment when the performers are hanging from the walls, as if falling from the sky.

Everything that happens through the performance is heightened. And not a single word is spoken throughout. Then the piece takes on the feel of a hammer horror play. The space which has been immaculate and smooth is then destroyed. Hammer marks smashed through the walls, sections of the plasterboard ripped from the walls. There are performers coming through the floor being dragged down into the space below. It becomes very violent in places. The use of the hammer to smash the walls makes the audience sit up and take notice. They smash the walls up and narrowly miss each other's head in the process. Then from the dark macabre it turns into a beautiful love story. Flowers are passed round by the performers, and there are moments of intense beauty and love which take your breath away.

The whole performance is extremely physically demanding. I do not envy the performers at all for putting their bodies through this performance every night. It's dirty, it's grimy, it's filthy, and plasterboard gets in your eyes, in your hair, ruins all your clothes. The whole negative space has been trashed. And what is left? A huge mess, a smashed up set and some destroyed reckless sleepers.

For me Negative Space is a story of love, of relationships, of life and of death. There were beautiful moments where the performers made me feel really uncomfortable. Where I thought there was going to be a moment of tenderness and of love, but this turned into a moment of madness. The performers need to be congratulated on how they handled this piece, which in places reminded me of a Samuel Beckett play. Sand marking your territory, someone crashing through the wall to invade your space, the neutrality of the wall that if you touch it no one can hurt you.

If you get chance to see Reckless Sleepers you must challenge yourself to engage in this play. A fantastic performance and an intense journey.