

**Dance**

**Shaun McLeod**

**Alice Cummins**

**Paul Romano, Siobhan Murphy and Fiona Bryant**

**Lights and music**

**Joey Lehrer**

**Words...**

Shaun McLeod

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***Watching the audience watch***

Fifteen minutes before the performance is due to start and no one has turned up. Disappointment bites but then I think that's OK. It can be satisfying performing to each other. But by 7.00 pm (starting time) the room is full of people (it's a small room). Where did they all come from? Why did they come? Why would anyone want to watch this?

The seats are arranged in a semi-circular embrace around the performing area. They are steel-framed with wooden seats and backs – old institutional given charm by age. But they still don't receive you warmly and their design indicates an era of formality and a requirement for sitting up straight and being on your best behaviour. And yet, over the course of the performance, the audience manages to forget themselves and drape themselves over the seats in a collection of shapes and attitudes. When I am watching from behind the audience, they are not full lit. Their shapes become shadowy, etched outlines and they look picturesque; an impromptu life-drawing in charcoal.

The people watching seem both transparent and hard to read in the ways they receive the dancing. And again, I'm struck by the question; why would anyone want to watch tonight's performance? It is not easy for the uninitiated. It is sometimes slow, there is very little music to leaven the mood, and sometimes the dancers seem insular as they negotiate internal conditions.

Some people sitting extend their legs into the space, leaving large gaps behind their lower backs and perching on the seats with scapulae and sitz bones. Others rotate one shoulder to the seat, adjust their legs and turn their heads in opposition to watch. Sometimes they rest their heads in their hands and round their backs. They fold their arms, they fidget with their hands, they sit very still with concentrated gaze, they yawn, they drop their eyes, look at the walls, smile, laugh. Two children roll on the floor with no thought to maintaining attention if the action is not to their taste. The room goes through phases of concentration or engagement that sometimes is a shared surge or lull and at others is a jumble of individual directions of attention.

This improvised dancing tonight is not always 'easy' to watch. It takes some work to stay alive to it and perhaps some practice to understand the dancers processes, just as the dancers themselves rise and fall in waves of involvement. But maybe this challenge is actually what draws people to it. How do you make sense of this unfamiliarity? It's certainly cheaper than travelling to a foreign country and having to think on your feet to interpret the multiple references that swirl around you in a tongue you don't know. You have to work to find the nuances of meaning and this is part of the exhilaration of travel. Perhaps this is what our audience wants from tonight's performance – the opportunity to interpret without instruction, signposts, or absolutes.

And for each of the three pieces there are moments when suddenly the dancing takes off. Alice shifts gear from her hypnotic kinaesthetic exploration and talks, then shrills, in a monologue that gives retrospective shape to all that she danced before. The mood changes for Paul, Siobhan and Fiona who come out of the wilderness into a clearing made all the more wondrous by the strangeness of the journey they took to get there. For me, I finally find my feet, see the audience, play with them, ebb and flow between dancing and talking. I remember rolling into a line of people watching from the floor and discovering an unopened block of chocolate (nobody eats ice creams or lollies when they come to *The Little Con*). I look up at the person who owns it and we lock eyes in a glance that is momentarily intense. She understands the humour of this discovery but she does not resile from me at all. She holds her ground and there is a moment of looking, when I see her and she fills that look with her presence. For a second she has joined me in the dance.

Siobhan Murphy

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Shaun:

A playful generosity towards those watching, a conversational sensibility with them, with speech or without it. A sporting bounce to things, both on a physical and relational level (this was an interesting correlation for me).

Alice:

The tremor and reverberance of strings plucked. Glimmers of south-east Asia in the sound and in the fingers. Her embodied experience seemed to summon an intensity over time, erupting in a tumble of words that I wanted to ignore so as to only hear the guttural cadence and spike of them rather than the content.

The trio:

The unfamiliarity of the space-time of performing with two others with no plan other than a basic temporal structure...So interestingly different to solo performance. Made me reflect on the differences between the words 'impromptu' and 'improvised'. The challenge of negotiating an encounter with another in the altered space/time of performance...the desire for that encounter to feel genuine but uncertain about what comprises genuineness in this context.

Paul Romano

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'Why do people come to the little con? There's no way in, it's not about anything. It's just weird.'

To begin with some guy goes out there and walks about the space, he tries a few things out but nothing seems quite right, so I notice his shirt and trousers - he's dressed up, hair thinning a little - and as my attention wanders, taking in the edges, it falls together with a kind of down to earth, slightly melancholy, humorous honesty: falling into the floor, momentarily sitting next to someone, threatening to steal someone else's chocolate, the blanket, the Island, legs jutting from behind the curtain - refusing to leave, lights off, on, off, on, off.

Does that make sense - or is it shameless amateurism?

There was a woman, kind of strangely macabre, evocative and soft all at once. Stark grey hair and memories, fragments - hysteria and a long slow fade.

Then a duet, two girls - slow, one stood still, and a man, lurching, changing configurations in a strange world of movement, sounds, fleeting characters, snatches of song, a piece of paper and a chair.

Maybe it's professional amateurism that only makes sense when you don't try (to make sense of it).

Fiona Bryant

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The dream starts as a man emerges from the audience. He is at once differentiated from this unfamiliar clan with a series of poked 'space testing' gestures. As it turns out he is a serious bloke, into real estate, dark chocolate and writing his autobiography in major detail. Such a man must endure some process to leave a space and despite such careful a packing ritual, he leaves in it...

...perhaps his sister, though she is not in the least like him. Much older, less dreamy, more disturbed by the reality of this land. But related they are by their sharing of this unfamiliar watching clan, amidst which lies (stands and squats)

...a trio of interpreters, destined to... go where they nor this space have journeyed before if only to see how everything is entirely different and unexplainable but nonetheless intriguing and the seed of an appetite for much, much more...

A man enters the space alone – he measures softly what lies underfoot, spine swinging, head following tail. Doubt enters his dance; he stumbles endearingly into and out of different foci. The man notices and I notice the regular sound of the door opening as late-comers continue to enter. He slips out ... returns ... he will leave on his own terms ... his presence leaves a trace of tender, palpable vehemence ... darkness.

I remove socks, sweater and step between the chairs. I am listening acutely to the emergence of sound ... it precedes me – stark and sparse to begin, accumulating later to permeate the space and my body with flat, fractured, resonate strikes on a 'ruined piano'.

What am I doing here ... out here? The sounds impose. I am in a vast landscape - it sucks me in. Ordinary navigation doesn't work, the horizon terrifies. I touch the ground with my face. The space wraps around my body rocking me. Words spill unexpectedly from my mouth - piano hands ... keys ... entrapment ... confined in bones ... the bones of colonisation ... a "hysterical woman."

Two women enter stepping deliberately. Complexity emerges slowly. The perspective I have is distant, emotionally and spatially. A single man joins them. There is a strange sometimes jocular yet consistent rhythm to their dancing. Their moving has a distant, lonely machination feel. Its rhythm and duration is intriguing. As the viewer I am drawn in to the detail of a face, a hand, a belly, the flash of skin. One woman remains lying down; the other draws a chair down the front and sits on it. It's an ending ... one ending.

The night has a strange intriguing and slightly uneasy left over feel to it. What have I performed? What have we performed? Do I know? Can we know? Who knows? It's the 'little con!'