

Review: FLEXER & SANDILAND - WEIGHTLESS

Performance: 10 OCTOBER - COMING TO THE PLACE, 8 & 9 NOVEMBER 2013
reviewed by charlotte constable - THURSDAY 24 OCTOBER 2013



Reviewed at the University of Chichester's Showroom, 10 October, 2013

Two decades of Yael Flexer's choreography are celebrated this year in Flexer & Sandiland's dance-digital collaboration, *Weightless*, performed this month at the University of Chichester's ShowRoom. Flexer became Choreographer in Residence at The Place back in 1993, and this November she returns to the place it all began (no pun intended) – this time with her long-term professional collaborator and digital installation-maker, Nic Sandiland. In *Weightless*, Flexer – with the support of Wendy Houstoun's dry humour on the script – examines those factors of both her past and present which give weight to her day-to-day life, and those which exert weight as an on-going, impenetrable force of stress. Flexer and her accompanying six performers wander about, an aeroplane engine hums, clouds float by in the fairly unremarkable opening moments. The relevance of this to the work's title slowly unfolds as a voice from a suspended speaker demands 'pick me... pick me up,' and the dancers begin to fleetingly lift and drop each other. This looming, faceless speaker is anthropomorphised as it passes from one dancer to the next, its challenges gradually taking a more

satirical stance towards the increasingly abstract demands of the dancer. Its request to an outstretched Flexer to 'do that [move] more three-dimensionally', followed by Flexer's puzzled facial expression and slight curving of her body, is really very funny.

Understanding of Nic Sandiland's role as an 'installation-maker' comes to the fore when the dancers rearrange cameras to capture their fellow performers from hidden perspectives. There is something rather thrilling about suddenly seeing the eyes of dancers, (collapsed on the floor their backs to the audience) are wide open and alert, staring silently into the lens. And then, the theme of weightlessness is reiterated from yet another thought-provoking angle (literally) as contact-fuelled duets are filmed upside down, bodies seemingly hanging from a height on the screen behind them.

Despite engaging the dancers in a dialogue with the audience, there are moments where the relationships in *Weightless* become more introverted; where the sharing of weight is perhaps unwanted. KJ Mortimer shuts her eyes as Hannah Martin quivers her hips and flaps her arms in attempt to wake her. Eventually, all it takes is a whisper – and I wonder if Flexer is commenting on the kind of support needed to lift a weighty burden.

Although Flexer may not want to hear it (as she – or is it Houston? – complains in her stream of consciousness about the 'bird impressions and monkeys' of contemporary dance last decade), for me there are parallels to be drawn between the choreography here, and that of Siobhan Davies' *Bird Song* (2004). Emotionless contact, constant rearranging of spatial relationships, effortless development of recurring motifs... there is never a dull moment. And indeed, the simultaneous physical interpretation of spoken text is not entirely original (also seen recently in *group's The Lessening of Difference*, 2011).

But by and large, Flexer has cleverly avoided the clichés she discusses by keeping her dance lively, technically challenging, and free of syrupy-sweet sentimentality. There are nonetheless a few subtly moving moments: textually – references to the pressures of age and physically – Flexer jumping on the spot, her arms hanging mid-air while she waits for someone to lift her.

In fact, the most stirring highlight comes as Flexer dons a pair of electrically-powered feather wings... but I won't ruin the wit of this moment by explaining how exactly she uses them. This is the kind of magic in which Flexer & Sandiland's collaboration truly shines, and it simply has to be seen. Go.

Flexer & Sandiland's *Weightless* is at The Place on 8 & 9 November, with a pre-show presentation of Flexer's work made for youth and graduate companies Anniversary Sharings

More details: www.theplace.org.uk

Photos: Chris Nash

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