

Tilted Productions

'Masquerade'

The Place: 3 March 2011

Those of a certain age might recognise *'Masquerade'* as the title of a celebrated – but ultimately infamous* – book by Kit Williams that triggered not only a nationwide hunt for a buried treasure (a golden, bejewelled hare) but also a whole new genre of detective books that contained the clues for treasure hunts. Williams' book told how the golden hare was carried from the moon to the sun but was lost on the way and in fifteen surrealist paintings he provided a fiendishly difficult cipher to its recovery. Whether Maresa von Stockert's eponymous work of dance theatre for Tilted Productions has anything to do with a very grown-up children's book, written over 30 years ago, is of no consequence but they are strangely bound together not only by their title but through a surrealist exploration of the psyche that challenges, both in a voluntary and involuntary context, the hidden depths of human intellect.

von Stockert's *'Masquerade'* begins before the audience arrives with some performers "asleep" under duvets on the stage, a device that continues for several minutes after the audience settles. One amusing deconstructive product of this unusual opening was how the audience acts in unison, chatting away until at some unclear signal everyone quiets down for several seconds before – realising that nothing was yet starting on stage – the hubbub picks up again, only once more to stop suddenly; thus demonstrating that a crowd of people behaves with the same cryptic solidarity as a flock of birds!

The opening makes plain that subsequent events are the mental paraphernalia of

our dreams and nightmares with the black floor opening out into a wriggling snake that consumes the sleeping bodies. What follows is a disorientating, episodic journey through a troubled night. John Schoonraad's prosthetic masks are a regular addendum to the six performers; from the early appearance of a goblin to the giant, shape-shifting head of the closing sequence, which provides a hiding place for Simon Palmer, his two arms stretched out under the face to provide a strange injection of life into the well-known image of the 'Kilroy was Here' graffiti. The performance ends with a slow-moving diagonal solo in which Palmer removes several masks from his head, one enclosing another, babushka doll-style, to be discarded like the decapitated detritus of some monstrous guillotine, while the giant mask lays to one side, left cheek down.

It isn't all as dark as this. There's a frothy solo in which Amy Bell, dressed in a black dress, emerges with three legs and for a while – even when seen at close quarters – she manages to play a limb version of the three-card trick by cleverly concealing which leg is false. I also enjoyed two reflective duets for Jake Ingram-Dodd and Joy Constantinedes (of whom, more later) as, firstly, father and baby in which Constantinedes (as the woman/baby) is kept airborne; and then later in a profoundly moving duet for the same pair, which includes a memorably powerful, swirling one-armed lift.

Conspicuous above so much arresting work was the choreography's remarkable challenge to the basic theatrical concept of frontality. Five dancers (one of them a man seamlessly integrated with the four women) wearing tight, black, backless evening gowns perform a five-minute interpretation of *Ondine (Lent)* from Ravel's piano composition *Gaspard de la Nuit*, facing away from the audience. Trisha Brown famously made a solo – 'If you couldn't see me' – based entirely upon the fluctuating landscape of her back in motion. The impact of Brown's deconstruction of the frontal convention of dance through this sculptural and anatomical exploration of the back is multiplied by five in von Stockert's re-interpretation and – as with Rauschenberg's treatment of Brown – it is gloriously enhanced through the bas-relief chiaroscuro of light and shadow by being lit from the side.

One back in particular was a remarkable topography with tightly-knit muscles rippling like the unseen piano keys playing Ravel. It belongs to Joy Constantinedes; apparently a woman of an uncertain age although the facts reveal that her next birthday will be number 62. A founder member of Kim Brandstrup's Arc Dance Company, Constantinedes is a prime example of age becoming a matter of no importance and she is a dancer very much in demand (after 'Masquerade' Constantinedes moves to DV8 for Lloyd Newson's next project). She is a performer with a significant stage presence, capable of mixing peaceful softness with quick, electric pulses.

With its deep veneer of surrealist art and eclectic references that veer from comedy to melancholy and onto the edge of terror, von Stockert and her team have succeeded in producing a thought-provoking work that is perfectly paced and fascinating; and within it there is a truly captivating gem of a dance. Writing in the 'Dancing Times' my friend and colleague, Ian Palmer, espoused that 'Masquerade' was worth a full constellation of stars and I wholeheartedly concur.

Graham Watts

Dancers featured: Bell, Constantinedes, Ingram-Dodd, Palmer

Postscript: * Kit Williams' 'Masquerade' was ultimately infamous because it transpired six years after the treasure was discovered that the "winner" had cheated and discovered the hare's whereabouts not through deciphering the clues

but allegedly from the partner of a former girlfriend of the author.

edit to correct sp mistake and add missing bracket close

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GW

09-03-11, 01:55 PM (GMT)



1. "RE: Tilted Productions: 'Masquerade' - The Place: 3 March 20"

In response to [message #0](#)

Addendum:

I believe that the dancer I credit in the review for the solo with three legs was, in fact, **Natalia Thorn**. My apologies for the mis-attribution!

Graham

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