

Reviews of The Space Between

The Space Between

Reviewer

Cameron Woodhead

September 10, 2005



Performers David Carberry (left) and Darcy Grant rehearse for *The Space Between*.

Photo: John Donegan

The Space Between **Circa North Melbourne Town Hall Arts House,** **until September 17**

STRADDLING the divide between circus and contemporary dance, Brisbane's Circa brings us a new and uniquely dynamic kind of performance.

The Space Between, its latest show, is a circus act like no other. There are, of course, acrobatics galore but, unlike a traditional circus, these extraordinary feats of physical prowess are about more than just the spectacle.

Instead, Circa aims to use the techniques of the big top as a form of dramatic communication: to suggest moods, situations, and even the occasional mini-narrative. From the opening sequence, which features a veritable orgy of tumbling, the skill and raw presence of the three performers make themselves felt.

What follows is an hour-long showcase of balance, strength and flexibility that remains tight and expressively choreographed throughout. Highlights include David Carberry's awesome display of socket-popping contortions, and Chelsea McGuffin's and Darcy Grant's riveting, inventively conceived static trapeze routine.

Director Yaron Lifschitz has set *The Space Between* to an eclectic and at times jarring array of music: from J. S. Bach and the songs of Jacques Brel to the latest in experimental electronica.

But there is a conflict at the heart of the physical performance: it somersaults (sometimes quite literally) between intimacy and alienation, between sensuality and torment — and the sound design accentuates those tensions.

The one weak moment is the brief, ham-fisted dialogue. Native speakers of the language of the body, the performers come across as foreign tourists in the realm of verbal theatre. But this is a minor quibble in what is otherwise a seamless and utterly captivating production that redraws the limits to which circus can aspire.

At the performance I saw the audience didn't immediately applaud. Not because they weren't enthralled by the performance, but because they didn't want it to end.

Out of thin air

Leah Mercer



Chelsea McGuffin, Darcy Grant, David Carberry, *The Space Between*, photo: Justin Nicholas

From the moment of being directed to Circa's studio rather than the main performance space at the Judith Wright Centre, *The Space Between* is something out of the ordinary. With the audience placed up against the 4 walls in a single row of seats facing a rectangular mat in the centre of the room, the space is bare, except for a single trapeze hanging in the centre. This sparse beginning is a kind of empty canvas that we will watch paint itself.

Lit only from above and sometimes assisted by projections, the mat becomes textured with shadows that create shapes, or inversely, spaces in which the performers place themselves. In the light and in between, the performers are confined and defined. This recurring attention to space is in keeping with the production's exploration "into the things that keep us apart and our desire to be together".

These lighting states also ensure that this is a piece about bodies rather than faces and when these bodies (performers Chelsea McGuffin, Darcy Grant and David Carberry) enter and take their place there is an impassive quality, an effortlessness that is neatly contradicted by the moment they engage and the performance begins. The passion and effort builds in an accumulation of moments, of stunning solo dexterity, beautiful duets and gorgeous ensemble work. This is a work of momentum and of images tumbling one after the other. The moving bodies, the riffing physical images and the constant, changing patterns of light on the floor create rich impressions.

The integrated soundtrack ranges from Jacques Brel songs to industrial sounds. When it describes "walking and falling at the same time" we seem to have lost track of which way is up and which way is down as the performers defy our logical understanding of what bodies can do. When McGuffin is lifted up to the trapeze, the vertical dimension of the space—right there in front of us the whole time—seems to open up. And that's one of the many qualities of this work, what it creates out of thin air. McGuffin's work on the trapeze is stunning, an exquisite, crash mat-free, heart-stopping duet, performer melding with apparatus.

The other two performers are equally compelling. Carberry has the flexibility of a rag doll coupled with amazing feats of strength, while Grant brings a mix of grace and danger. The only false note came in the stories told by McGuffin and Grant. Without the flair or seamlessness intrinsic in every other element of the production, the texts seemed oddly out of place.

This is a brave work, a simple performance that is strikingly complex, without tricks and yet full of them. Resting on the skills and presence of its 3 performers, *The Space Between* gives them no room to hide, nor do they need it.

Chloe Goodyear, M/C REVIEWS
24 August, 2005

The Circa Studio in the Judith Wright Centre of Contemporary Arts is intimate, but it's bare – the perfect canvas for exacting, deliberate and precise performance embodying the intimacy of human relationships. Love triangles, duets and the relationship with the self, thrown into stark relief by a bare space as set. The warmth and intimacy generated on stage is enforced by positioning the artists and audience so near each other, closing in the traditional space without the foils of stage, rows of seating and dedicated off-stage entrance. Like a splash of red paint on the canvas, all design – lighting, costuming, sound and props, as well as the choice of cast, assume a particularly strong significance. All are excellent in this production.

The cart-wheeling and tumbling of the opening scene established not only the cyclic nature of the relationships under scrutiny, but also set the scene for Circa – a company that draws strength from simplicity and meaning from imagery and suggestion. Artists cite risk and immediacy as the hooks of circus, and both are present in this performance. From an audience perspective, good circus is related to skill – the performer's ability to make things that are technically challenging look effortless, but also to their capacity to endow the movements with a mood or sentiment that contributes to the theme of the piece. Circus has something in common with mime in that skill and technique still require a good amount of that intangible gift that makes their every action, as their only means of expression, compelling viewing. It is a little to do with confidence, and a little to do with charm...

With the French renowned as most fluent in the international language of love, the music of Jacques Brel is well chosen. Torment and torture are conveyed through mood, the language interpreted by the bodies of the artists. Circus could well be the physical embodiment of French, with an appropriate expression for all circumstances and the borrowing of language when their own won't serve. The Circa performers are powerful diplomats, communicating confidently with diverse skills. Dance speaks where adagio can't, trapeze is used to highlight isolation and physical comedy, a flicker of magic and interpretive dance converge for '*le week end chaud*' – a hot, intense emotional tryst with each other and the audience lasting just under an hour...

The beauty of the routines is that while they may be linked in basic narrative, there is no didactic play or order to interpret it logically. The mind locks into the pace and mood of the work. Rather than following a storyline as in traditional dance or theatre, or oohing and aahing in applause over skill presentation, *The Space Between* is experienced as a series of jolts, impulses and stream of consciousness. The pieces that are played close to the music become comedy – interpretive dance lightens a mood but doesn't break it. There's an honesty and integrity which is a refreshing change to the blatant brow-beating anguish of some physical theatre, or the of uncomfortable intimacy of the same concepts explored in words...

Circa's real triumph is the physicalisation of the emotional and mental mechanics of relationships. The intended and accidental manipulations, violence, tenderness and frailty of the human state are explored deliberately, poignantly and gracefully by the artists and director, leaving a satisfied and fulfilled audience basking in the afterglow.

COURIER MAIL

Minimalist set lets bodies do the talking

The Space Between
Circa Performance Ensemble
ENERGEX Brisbane Festival
Judith Wright Centre, until October 2
Reviewed by Gillian Wills

Yaron Lifschitz challenges the audience to suspend expectations of entertainment and prepare for a more meaningful communication in his latest excursion into re-imagined circus.

Circa's latest production is an artistic and athletic foray into minimalism. There is no narrative or climatic arc to the hour's performance. Instead, performers Darcy Grant, Chelsea McGuffin and Rockie Stone gracefully range through fluid sequences of spectacular lifting manoeuvres, supple physical contortions and paired acrobatic prowess.

There are entanglements of multiple limbs, flurries of parallel backward and forward-tumbling routines, and similarly confronting segments that eerily evoke passages of human behaviour. Circa invites its observers to interpret these poetically shaped circus acts and repertoire of startling movements in any way they choose.

An eclectic sound collage of a seemingly random selection of musical snippets presents extracts from the music of J.S. Bach, Jacques Brel, Laurie Anderson, Gavin Bryars and (I've Had) The Time of My Life from Dirty Dancing. Electronically phased abstractions of evocative beeps, growls and pulsating riff fragments also contribute to the evocative score that accompanies the trio's choreographed athletics. Backflips, somersaults and other kinds of gymnastic exertions become diverse expressions of "in-betweenness"; the liminal chasms between human connection and disconnection and the aching spaces of limbo resonating within the self.

Stage setting is the "square". A malleable conception that is the squareness of the room itself with its purpose-built surround of seating and large squared mat in the centre.

Lighting projections of smaller grids are changeable, multiple realities – the beach, swimming pool, arena, bed, prison – or else a metaphorical abstraction of the confinement and constraint of sexual and emotional intimacy.

One of the most effective and striking segments was when the illumination created shadowy, criss-crossed, cage-like meshing which served as an angular enclosure for McGuffin and Grant's ritualistic dance of interlocking codependence.

There are no hula hoops, juggling memorabilia or scaffolded climbing frames constructed from chairs; the primary circus legacy is a free-floating cradle suspended from the ceiling. Physical routines from this apparatus create new spatial dimensions as in turn each acrobatic is dramatically hoisted into the air. The device is a vehicle for some scarily daring, virtuosic and highly synchronised aerial routines between performers.

At a few points, the pace sagged and some scenes did not gel within the overall concept. Nevertheless the skill level, gymnastic eloquence and conceptual intention was inspiring and thought-provoking, and clearly stirred the audience.

Arts Beat

C!RCA: The Space Between

Circus is, perhaps, the best theatrical medium to portray such a complex emotion as love. And what is love these days without one of its most confusing and arduous predicaments – the love triangle. In their most serious production of the season, Contemporary Circus ensemble C!RCA explores the age-old saga using nothing but the connections and spaces between three bodies.

The performers – Darcy Grant and Chelsea McGuffin alongside the company's newest darling David Carberry – play out an intricate narrative of wanting and owning, framed within patches of slinky lighting that are projected from above. Whilst being technically and conceptually astounding, the performance never steepens into the realms of sentimentality. Restricted almost entirely to acrobatic floor work, the three remain impassive in their facial expressions, choosing to convey meaning solely through physical movement. French crooner Jacques Brel provides a consistent romantic musical overtone as they interchange partnerships and sketch out all-too-familiar scenarios.

In a welcome transgression from the ensuing drama, Chelsea provides one of her quirky interpretive dances, Darcy engages in an endearing spoken word piece and David (looking impossibly wholesome and boyish) contorts his body into some of the most awkward positions imaginable. Seated around the C!RCA rehearsal space, the audience is consistently enthralled for the entire duration of the show. In all, it's an entertaining evening for anyone who's ever been involved in a love triangle, which is to say, pretty much everyone.

The Space Between will run at the Judith Wright Centre nightly at 8pm until Set 3.