

Dance at the Edinburgh Fringe

Various venues, Edinburgh – August 8 to 15, 2018

FOR THE FIRST TIME ever, this year's *Edinburgh Fringe Festival* welcomed a full-length ballet, *Giselle* by **Ballet Ireland** at Dance Base. Ludovic Ondiviela's topical retelling is innovative and cleverly sidesteps the need for a large corps de ballet, although it could be stronger dramatically.

Ryoko Yagyu's innocent and easily led *Giselle* is killed off inside ten minutes, a victim of knife violence. The rising of *Giselle*'s spirit from her body is sensitively done but the police investigation that reveals the blade was wielded by Bathilde hardly sets pulses racing. Act II is vastly superior. With hollowed-out eyes, the Hammer horror-style cobweb-covered bodies that rise from their tombs are decidedly creepy, their beautifully stern-faced leader (Céline le Grelle) the spookiest of all. Ondiviela makes much of *Giselle* coming to terms with her ghostly form, which Albrecht initially cannot see; a neat touch.

Among other excellent productions at the Grassmarket venue was *The Spinners* by **Limosani**

Projekts from Australia and **AI Seed Productions** which centres on the three fates of Greek mythology, seen first as a single multi-limbed being, but who soon break free to be reimagined as mill workers. In highly charged dance, they spin and cut the thread of life against a backdrop of a wall of tassels, each representing a human body. Things get really interesting when one of the Fates goes maverick. Guy Veale's super accompaniment, in which you can hear shuttling looms, adds to the supernatural atmosphere. I understand *The Spinners* is likely to tour in 2019. It's not to be missed.

The four brothers that make up **Chang Dance Theatre** from Taiwan have a gem in Eyal Dadon's *Bon 4 Bon*, an inventive and beautifully-judged look at memories of childhood that always seem to come back to who ate the mangos that used to mysteriously disappear from the fridge. As they reminisce and dance playfully, there are touches of rivalry and even jealousy, but their friendship always shines through.

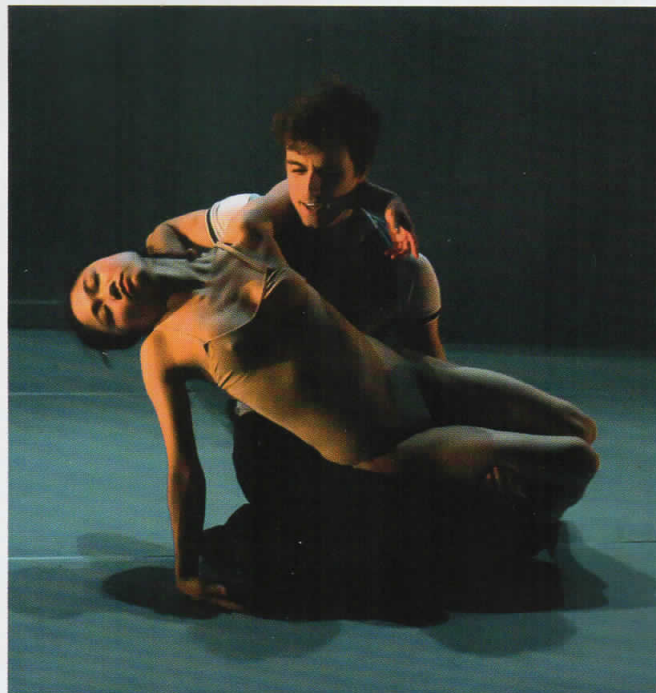
Taiwan's **Tjimur Dance Theatre** impressed equally with *Varhung – Heart to Heart*, a deeply felt work in which explosive bursts of action punctuate calmer

moments. Private joy, anger and sadness bubble to the surface as the performers continually whisper questions of themselves.

I also enjoyed **Ima Iduozee** in *This is the Title*, part of his search for a personal choreographic handwriting. Fluid and elegant, Iduozee showed a lovely sense of suspension as he moved. As good was **WRoNGHEADED** by **Liz Roche Company**, an intense look at the repression of women's health rights in Ireland that was claustrophobic and brought home a sense of helplessness.

Dance Base even had gumboot dancing courtesy of **Njobo Productions** from

Above: Ryoko Yagyu and Rodolfo Saraiva in Ballet Ireland's *Giselle*. Below: Elsa Couvreur and Mehdi Duman in *Anchor*.



South Africa. **SOWhereTO Africa** certainly had energy but rather more appealing were the 12- to 19-year-old dancers of **34/18 Youth Dance Company** from Cape Town at ZOO Southside, a perfect demonstration of just what an ocean of talent that country has. Particularly impressive was Kirvan Fortuin's *UFOUR*, a thoughtful four-dancer look at gender that featured some excellent partnering.

Also at Southside was **Dam Van Huynh**'s new *Dep*, a piece inspired by Vietnamese rituals for the dead. Four men and two women, all naked throughout, follow the process of loss and rebirth. Their bodies as symbolic as real, they first stand for an age, then lurch and collapse in grief before re-emerging. It's a difficult piece, raw and not pretty, but there's a lot in it.

Although the narrative was cloudy at times, easier watching came with *A Life on the Silk Road*, a **National Theatre of China** work about ➤





the 2nd-century BC explorer Zhang Qian. As Zhang, Wu Junda was heroic but with a sense of humanity, the petite Tian Ge light-footed in a symbolic portrayal of Zhang's horse, and Yu Hua delightful as his playful wife. The ensemble conjured up armies, wind, rain, a human sandstorm and a snowy landscape. Musician Pan Yu was outstanding on pipa and guzheng.

The marble-pillared French Institute was the elegant venue for *(Mes)dames*, a solo project by Scottish Ballet's **Constant Vigier** that explores the pressures of modern life on three women and their struggle against societal labels and expectations. Danced at seriously close quarters and mostly to the electronic pop of Christine and the Queens, a series of intelligently made solos reveal the trio's stresses and uncertainties as they seek gender equality. Firmly rooted in classical ballet, *(Mes)dames* was usually danced on weekdays by students from the Royal Conservatoire. I was lucky enough to pick a Sunday and flawless performances by Scottish Ballet's Sophie

Martin, Roseanna Leney and Grace Paulley.

This year's *Dance-Forms International Choreographer's Showcase* was at St Stephen's Church, now owned by Peter Schaufuss, and where he plans to open a full-time ballet school next year. Of the six varied works, two male solos stood out. *If*, choreographed by **Mariuca Marzà** of Ballett Eisenach, is a very personal take on the meaning behind Kipling's poem. To music by René Aubry, Francesco La Macchia danced effortlessly and with deep emotion. In *Time and No Time* by **Susana B Williams**, Birmingham Royal Ballet's Brandon Lawrence was all sleek elegance in a dance inspired by forces in the journey of life. Reflecting Bahramji and Maneesh De Moor's music, I also saw the strength and grace of an Eastern warrior.

Greenside Nicholson Square threw up a delightful hour in the company of **Elsa Couvreur** of Woman's Move and **Mehdi Duman** in *Anchor*. In a wonderfully observed probing, the performers open the door on love, something they cannot escape from, however hard they try, or at least think they

Above: Burn the Floor in *Rebels of the Ballroom*.

try. Their personalities shone through in the quality dance and light-touch humour. I smiled for hours afterwards. At ZOO Charteris, Couvreur also presented *The Sensemaker*, an amusing solo showing her battling the impossible expectations of a recorded telephone voice, and the engaging *Drop the Gogo*, in which six go-go dancers question their dreams and ambitions.

At Greenside Royal Terrace, **Eowyn Emerald and Dancers** presented eight short pieces. Brevity translated into a lack of depth, however, with most also suffering from Emerald's seeming desire to get all four dancers on stage. Space was frequently an issue, everything feeling desperately confined. The best came towards the end in a dance developed as a response to gun violence in the US.

The highlight of *Elicitations*, a programme of three contemporary ballets by **Hack Ballet** was artistic director Briar Adams' *Grace*, a work inspired by Górecki's *Symphony of*

Sorrowful Songs that focuses in on relationships between different couples. The first duet, which carries an undercurrent of violence, is especially strong. There was clearly quite a range in skill level between the seven dancers, but it was a pleasing hour nonetheless.

Ballroom got blitzed by **Burn the Floor** in *Rebels of the Ballroom*. Think *Strictly on Steroids*. You have to admire the energy but it's brash, loud and often choreographically questionable, not least the gladiator scene with hints of bondage. It was a relief to escape.

Queer Words by **Autin Dance Theatre** combines dance and text as Johnny Autin considers "toxic ideals of masculinity" and gender roles. Oliver Sale was lithe and expressive but shouty Bethany Slinn's "queer alphabet" felt like a mere excuse to throw words around. Attempts at humour and audience participation were weak. It could have been bold, provocative and thought-provoking, but never gets close.

Unusual offerings included *Wiredo* by **Hanna Moissala**, combining dance, tightwire walking and shibari, the Japanese art of artistically binding the body with ropes. One dance on the wire excepted, it was mostly dull. *Sky Labyrinths* by **Alyona Ageeva Physical Theatre PosleSlov** from Russia meanwhile featured an expressionistic duet, two topless women who did little and a man in a cowboy hat and sunglasses. Their *Some(Body)*, an exploration of nakedness, was more coherent, the dancers appearing like Greek sculptures, the movement having a sense of ritual and sanctity.

DAVID MEAD