

Scattered Tacks Reviews

Yaron Lifschitz (Circa), describes Scattered Tacks as "one of the most challenging and significant pieces of New Circus to emerge in years."

The Village Award for 'Most Outstanding Production' 2008 Melbourne Fringe

The Sunday Age

By John Bailey 12 October 2008

A truly astonishing experience renders its witnesses unable to act, transfixed to the spot. That's certainly the cast with this, a word-of-mouth sensation of this year's fringe. Most of the show occurs in near-total darkness, lit by head-mounted torches. There's no music or effects: the silence is deepened by the held breath of every audience member. While Scattered Tacks comes from the discipline of circus, this isn't the kind of hoopla that draws whooping cheers after each act. It's taut, deceptively simple performance that arrests the attention throughout.

Performers Terri Cat Silvertree and Skye and Aelx Gellmann strip circus back to its essence - balancing, juggling and the like without showiness or even emotion - and reinvent the form. Silvertree blankly peels and eats an onion; Skye supports himself atop a column of teetering cylinders wearing nothing but a moth-eaten jumper; Aelx, stripped to the waist, spreads sharp tacks across the floor for a terrifying final number. It's not sideshow shock or big-top spectacle. But it is, frankly, brilliant.



Scattered Tacks

By Richard Watts

Oh. My. God. This show was *amazing* - definitely my pick as the best show I've seen in the Fringe so far. To call it 'just circus' would be like saying J.R.R Tolkien was 'just' a fantasy writer. A complex and intense show that played with ambient sound, lighting, comedy, fragility and one's sense of smell, as well as providing moments of tension, awe and sheer joy, and which I wholeheartedly recommend you see before it closes this Sunday. Promise me you will?

Four and a half gasps of awed delight out of five.

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Realtime

doug leonard: circa's new circus now; sofia woods' blurred lines

(Extracted from Circa's New Circus Now review)

Scattered Tacks, from Melbourne trio Skye Gellmann, Aelx Gellman and Terry Cat Silvertree was created in a squat and the absence of electricity caused this three person ensemble to improvise their own lighting with torches strapped to their heads. No extraneous effects. Fragments of a life obscurely shared were dimly recreated. The light distorted, flattened and sculpted identifiable shapes into pure, foreboding forms. A woman is dissected by light. She is shaken, bent, turned into a mower, energetically fucked. A man lies on the ground with a heaving stomach. Another man tenderly puts a tea bag in his mouth and a tea cup on his forehead. He rises and hops to a teapot balancing a juggling ball on his foot. He puts the teabag in the cup and pours water from the teapot. He performs an exquisite three ball juggling act, ultimately balancing balls along his spine. The woman picks up an onion, peels it and tosses skins like petals. She eats the onion with sensuous gusto, breathing deeply and exhaling fumes until she begins to convulsively sob as if for release from the cycle of increasingly pungent desire.



Yaron Lifschitz described Scattered Tacks as “one of the most challenging and significant pieces of New Circus to emerge in years.” I would like to suggest another contender for such high stakes, not to be contrary, but to underscore what he clearly sees as the direction New Circus should be going. Sofia Woods’ Blurred Lines was a standout in the line-up at the Brisbane Powerhouse last year. Scouting the possibilities for transformation, Blurred Lines was itself transforming. It encompassed circus and dance, utilising the trapeze as a poignant and risky vehicle for an inner balancing act while affectionately trying on for size self-parodying lesbian roles—butch, femme, drag king—setting them up for an hilarious and bawdy contest for dominance within her own psyche. But she took us to a deeper level through a series of morphing projections of her own ‘bisexuality’, akin to what Virginia Woolf called “the androgynous mind.”

Woods’ scenario of reflecting mirrors was eventually stripped away, arriving at the liberating moment of a return to and a rediscovery of the body, representing the kindling of the kind of desire that, as Hélène Cixous puts it, “wouldn’t be in collusion with the old story of death.” By wholly eschewing ‘routines’, Woods was able to create a complex movement vocabulary unto itself, at times suffused by a vertiginous, melancholic poetry revealed in momentary glimpses of other (discarded?) selves—a spasmodically dying swan on point, a shadow boxer or, most strangely, a lupine beast loping with forefeet of high-fashion shoes. Like Scattered Tacks, Woods’ journey took on the risk of the other, of difference she was content to leave alone in the territory of the unknown, adding to, not subtracting from, the world’s possibilities. This kindred metamorphosis of an art form seems to be the one Lifschitz endorses.

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Buzzcuts

Tessa Leon Thursday Mar 5th, 2009

With its creation in an abandoned warehouse last year, *Scattered Tacks* owes much of its urban squat ambiance to the fringe depths of Melbourne's city outskirts. Each of the young Adelaide born trio has individually achieved extensive acclaim within the circus and drama industries, and their new collaboration has already received The Village Award for 'Most Outstanding Production' at the Melbourne Fringe. Though their show is listed in the circus program of the fringe guide it is safe to say it shares margins equally with dance, theatre and the absurd.

Essentially a collection of short acts, the immediate feature of the show is its darkness, that's literally, not metaphorically by the way. The meager light is controlled by head mounted and hand held torches from the performers, illuminating only what they want you to see. Is this because their Melbourne squat never had any electricity? Perhaps. Is it intriguing to watch an entire production lit like this? Absolutely. The second and equally unusual factor is the absence of amplified sound, in fact, make that the lack of any sound whatsoever. The energy and action is structured around a backdrop of absolute silence, broken only by the thud of landing feet, panting breath, or a noise-inducing prop (such as a bowling ball, a teapot, an onion, tacks and a toothbrush, to name a few). This mute and shadowy scene could, conceivably, be intensely engaging, yet at 11pm, *The Garden of Unearthly Delights* does not include 'quiet' in its vocabulary. Just as actors pause, gazing poignantly towards an increasingly captivated audience, the space is interrupted by burlesque tunes, boozing punters and all manner of obscure late-night sounds flooding in through the thin tent walls. The viewers too easily become distracted, and what would be the most mesmerizing element of the show becomes a major hindrance to its essential framework.

Containing three such versatile performers, acts include skillful acrobatics and stunning movement sequences, all with a twist in their end. There are plenty of other surprises



throughout the 45 minutes and yes, by surprises, I do mean nudity. Call it nu-circus, experimental or neo-contemporary-interpretative-art, perhaps *Scattered Tacks* is not everyone's cup of tea, but doubtless to say it will be unlike anything you've seen before, ever.

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Long Sentence No Suggestions.blogspot.com

Without wanting to unduly raise your expectations, this is magnificent. I had no expectations going into this, I saw it because a show I was supposed to be seeing was cancelled. And boy, was that fortuitous.

From the opening I found this to be totally compelling.

The three performers / devisers work against the performative history of circus to create something weird, silent and non-theatrical in a traditional sense. The minutia of their performances are heightened and sit in the foreground, the tricks receding and becoming byproducts. Some moments seemed purely voyeuristic - on the one hand you're watching something that is a private moment, on the other a quite incredible trick is pulled off. But the performer looks straight at you. Not challenging - somehow submissive. And it forces you to reassess your presence.

And this is their feat, and it is by no means a small one. To reverse the paradigm of traditional circus, to dare you passively not to look. To emphasise the elements normally glossed over.

Whilst the tricks are excellent, they are not what matters here. And this moves circus into a newer, more theatrical area, I suppose in that sense it is somewhat aligned with 'Acrobat'. The experience was that of a series of vignettes and resonant images, lit largely by the harsh, isolated light of head mounted LEDs, exaggerating the performers' seemingly translucent skin and ethereal, almost over-exposed appearance.

There are some fantastic moments of the performers forcing your attention to a tiny detail - the sound of a bowling ball that is being rolled around and balanced upon, picked up through an onstage mike held close, or their final trick, only seen by a couple of short flashes of their LEDs.

There is a convention amongst a circus audience to applaud tricks which was quite uncomfortable here. It never really took off and was always quite sparse and self-conscious. In itself, that is a credit to the show - it really is absorbing and the silence that fell on the audience was total, apart from those sporadic moments of obligatory applause.

I understand the need to applaud, particularly if you have a vocabulary for this kind of performance and understand the degree of skill that the performers are utilising, for me though, this sat more comfortably in the world of theatre than circus. And the applause broke the tension and was too intrusive. It threatens to destroy the strange, delicate little world that these performers had done so well to create.

This left me quite exhilarated.

Without wanting to sound presumptuous, I would probably go if I were you.

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