

Edinburgh Festival Fringe – 4.48 Psychosis ****



Fourth Monkey

theSpace on Niddry St

Drama/Physical Theatre

1hr5mins (Age 14+ guidance)

A disturbing transition confronted the audience as an unsettling sense of detached discomfort and observational intrusion became close to self-conscious voyeurism in this latest interpretation. Some have called it an extended suicide-note in dance and movement. Playwright, Sarah Kane committed suicide prior to its controversial premiere in 2000 and, since then, 4.48 has caused confusion, sometimes outrage, but also an empathic recognition of its visceral exposition of a tortured souls descent into psychosis and its chaotic manifestations. That this production was going to be an intense, possibly alienating experience, was taken as a given.

There is a desperate need to grasp at some, indeed any, sense of sense, some means of untangling the contorted threads of narrative chaos as we helplessly witness a young woman's psychotic disintegration. Is it madness? Is it manic

depression? Or is it just the familiar teenage tantrum anthem of, 'Nobody understands me!' shrieking hysterics? It is but a short while into the play before any doubts are put aside as the audience wince at the exploding emotional shrapnel from her disintegrating personality.

Tearing down the fourth wall between us with metaphorical bleeding fingernails she declares her intention to commit suicide. Co-directors, Steven Green and Charleen Qwaye, draw together a young and accomplished, all female, young ensemble cast whose intense, impassioned physicality is focused on the anonymous protagonist played by a confident and insightful Charlie Bate. This production exploits the device of Greek Tragedy chorus, where the conceit is to enable the large cast to assume the cacophony of disparate voices that tease, haunt and interrogate the tortured 'patient' .

Dressed in shredded hospital gowns they prowl and provoke her inner demons. Sometimes as frozen angels of helpless mercy, but increasingly, they are in her alter-ego's nightmares, vengeful, blaming Harpies. Seeking asylum in the hands of professional care, she finds that the inmates of her mind have already taken possession. How does she hope to balance howling abstracts against objective realities? 'My mind is the subject of these bewildered fragments' she tells both the asylum's good Psychiatrist/bad Psychiatrist.

Much of the action is played out on an under-lit floor with symmetrical in-laid light pods that represents a form of martial regularity but also become a bizarre template for games of 'Twister' (designer, Pablo Fernandez Baz). The dark, parody musical hall scene where featured chorus characters boast of yet another incremental success with the increasing dosage of psycotropic drugs sees 'the patient' reduced to catatonic compliance. She has become, in her own words, '...the eunuch of castrated thought.'

There is much to comment this production, where the sobriquet of 'experiment' has an acute sense of its self-irony. Jamie Flockton's sound montages play an integral part in enhancing the visual dynamic. Whilst not allegorical, there are themes to be interpreted from this production that have a contemporaneous applications that are sympathetically referenced by the co-directors. The promissory elixirs of 'beauty enhancement' products targeting and increasing susceptible young women's sense of negative body image 'Because they're worth it,' perhaps? Compounded by the revelation that even their celebrity role-model's illusory beauty has been digitally enhanced.

Madness in the public domain.

Disturbing, but not graphic scenes with explicit, but not contrived graphic language throughout confirms the 14+ advisory age.

