

Edinburgh Festival Fringe The Girl with no Heart ****

☒ Sparkle and Dark's Travelling Players

Bedlam Theatre

11b Bristo Place

Puppetry (PG) 55 mins

Anyone Who Has A Heart, Should Look At This.

Supported by The Japan Foundation, and on the anniversary of the second atomic bomb being dropped above Nagasaki, Sparkle & Dark invited both visitors and audiences, present and later, to participate in creating symbolic origami paper cranes. These metaphorical birds, symbolising Life's beautiful fragility, fluttered about and above the cafe/bar. It's always a welcoming Venue, The Bedlam, with its slightly fading bohemian informality.

Drawing on classical Japanese fables, the narrative unfolds through the ingenious combination of full-body shadow and silhouette, combined hand-puppetry and object manipulation.

Samura (Nichole Anderson) embarks on a journey from a magical land where every wish becomes true (a Midas touch that fails to satisfy her burning curiosity). She inevitably encounters alternative and all together more cathartic realities when she moves through the mystical stone gate guarded by seriously shadow-shaped lion.

Though embracing and poignant the story's cultural and historical antecedents are, and, whilst not labouring the symbolism of the awful consequences of the Hiroshima/Nagasaki horror, at times the narrative errs towards confused and introspective ambiguity. One wished that the beauty and visual potency of the shadow motifs were allowed more opportunity to express their magical wonder for their own part alone and,

reinforce the dialogue. In particular how we might visualise the impending threat to the city by the sieging 'Adult Army': a picture is worth a thousand words. The references to the ash that covers all about them in a patina of unspoken dread was, we assumed, the toxic fall-out from the atom-bomb. Younger ones in the audience might have needed more literal expositional context about this. The play, after all, is all about magical possibilities juxtaposed against stark realities. Unlike Samura, we would have opted for more visual fantasy any time, the scarier, the better! Especially like when the Stone Gate Lion growled his dark shadowed mane across Samura's path.

Throughout the performance, composer/cellist, Lawrence Illsley's sympathetic score draws on oriental soundscapes and evocative aural textures that enhance the play's sometimes ambivalent, but ever increasing and inclusive wonder. Tom Oakes, co-composer played, guitar/ukulele.

There is enchantment and heartache in this production and it well deserves playing that Fringe wild-card of, 'Let's be damned, and go out on a punt!' indulgence. Perhaps the kids will see and embrace wildly different interpretations and will have to explain it to their parents after the show.

A sincere, imaginative and beguiling passion coupled with crafted intelligence infuses and defines this company's admirable ethos. No clues about the denouement, but a comforting tissue might wisely be kept tucked up a sleeve in readiness.