

Edinburgh Festival Fringe REVIEW – Be Captivated & Balletique ****



The New Town Theatre is a super new venue hosting its first full Fringe season at the West End of George Street. Drama and dance are the main items on offer at what feels like a smaller, quirkier version of the Assembly Rooms. The venue is ordinarily a rather grand and austere Freemasons' Hall but a cool, inclusive, "social enterprise" vibe prevails for the fringe and the performing spaces are excellent. New Scottish theatre is also notable by its presence and it's only £1 for a diet coke. So two more things to celebrate there!

Looking at the dance on offer, Be Captivated is a sequence of classical and modern ballet pieces by a young group from London, Ballet Central. The early sequences are pleasant, including a lovely pas de deux, and I felt that the dances warmed up along with the dancers, and that the tone became increasingly more exotic and fun.

The highlights for me were two particularly ambitious, imaginative pieces. One, "Mapping", combines ingenious dances with clever camera work. As the dancers writhe, jive and shuffle on the floor of the stage, we see them from above (projected onto the back wall) acting out little scenes and the comic opportunities are not lost.

Better still is "Anon" which starts like a scenes from the 1920s but which comes to centre round a bespectacled, bookish modern day girl (like a balletic Alice in Wonderland) who dreams of romance as she reads and is soon swept into the action of her imagination. Be Captivated is at its best at these lighter and more romantic moments, but the sense of

audience engagement is transformed by the outstanding central performance of Bethany Pike whose comedy and acting skills, combined with real grace as a dancer, set her apart. Assailed variously by troops of imaginary footballers and jealous girlfriends, she lifts the piece and gives it a beating, joyful heart. Opposite her is Reece Causton as a football captain and he and the whole young company receive great acclaim as the curtain falls due to their honesty, enthusiasm and talent, and the ambitious, quirky choreography. As a stage for emerging artists, it's a great showcase.

Ballesque followed shortly after Be Captivated in the basement dance space and some dancers double up in both shows (most impressive). A seedy, otherworldly night club, with shades of Emcee and his Kit Kat Klub, is the main setting for what might be called a burlesque cabaret ballet created by Fait Accompli. A saucy nightclub singer croons classic tracks between the dance and acting scenes. Edith, a young French ballerina is enticed, it appears, into the Soho underworld by the owner called, revealingly, Sadisto. This dancer does wonderfully well, especially as I understand that she replaced the intended Edith the day before the show opened. Unlike Be Captivated, it's one single story, but still a mixed bag in terms of inventive scenes. Male swans keep Sadisto's racy young female dancers in check. When Edith's fate is finally revealed to us and her (the poor soul won't be leaving the club any time soon) she just does a gallic shrug and dances on. It's at times erotic, exotic and quixotic and doesn't take itself too seriously.



Personally, I preferred the variety and freedom of the dances in Be Captivated. The closing scene in Ballesque was one of the most memorable where the dancers forget their wicked roles and variously have fun or show off. As a full piece the storyline of Ballesque could have been stronger, but for those who like to watch good young dancers dancing well, there is

plenty to appreciate. The performers enjoy themselves tremendously and the effect is infectious.

Reviewer Ronald Orr

Ballesque Photo Bill Cooper