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Milieu 2018 – review, company strikes gold with unison

written by Ezekiel Oliveira | November 13, 2018



Frontier Danceland presents the annual double bill Milieu with two distinct works by guest choreographers Deborah Nightingale and Sascia Pellegrini co-choreographing with cultural medallion and artistic director [Low Mei Yoke](#).

The evening opens with *The Whole She-Bang* by Nightingale. In the programme notes she describes the piece as “an alternative expression for the female explosion which is happening right now across our planet.” Sammantha Yue takes the lead in this performance; it seems that the precise dance material was created around her body, even perhaps her character work. In one particular section at the beginning, Nightingale choreographs a fast-forward phrase where the dancers seem to wipe a tear from their cheek, sprinkling droplets out of the fingertips and immediately clasping hands together, it’s beautiful phrasing. The ensemble strikes gold in many unison sections, never missing a count. The ‘alternative expression’ is however sometimes subdued and lost in the choreographic structure which remains centre stage for much of the piece. A tableau evolves into an ensemble unison taking over the entire stage, shifting into a line, breaking into duets, trios and back again to tableau. A white tissue is removed from Yue’s pocket, perhaps signposting the idea of surrender. Surrender to dance and movement I imagine. This prop arises in other dancers too. The *Whole She-Bang* verges on dance theatre, but the dancers play to their strengths – abstract movement bringing a distinct physicality forwards.

Post interval, I take my seat in the audience, but the dancers are already set up on stage, whispering and humming in a straight line with odd orange and red costumes that inevitability reminds me of the Rajneeshee cult members from the Netflix documentary *Wild Wild Country*. This is not a cult piece, however. Sascia Pellegrini is upstage right playing music, and the company is immersed in an improvisation game using sound and movement, falling on the floor and recovering – the latter process accelerates until the dancers break out and dance across the entire stage. The lighting here is spot on, Gabriel Chan blinds the audience with a shower of light several times as the dancers stop moving to create an aggressive and sustained pause. The stage looks bare all of a sudden and the company plays to their forces listening to live rhythms, juxtaposing movement to pre-recorded music and breaking out the ensemble into small duets and trios. It’s exciting to see the company play, it sounds simple, but I genuinely thought they were children investigating the world through play and not dancers portraying the idea of a game. There is a sense of freedom throughout *Dimensions of Dialogue*. Curiously enough, the piece finishes with an encore to *Without me* by Eminem where the dancers throw shapes as I have never seen them doing before, it feels refreshing.

Milieu 2018 with Frontier Danceland at Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay 9&10 of November.

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