

Arch8 - Erik Kaiel



Mise – Story of a Girl North Edinburgh Arts Chalk About Artspace, Edinburgh No Man is an Island/My True North

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Festival directors are always going to talk up their programming choices, right? But Imagine's Tony Reekie wasn't palming off any wooden nickels when he enthused about Chalk About (Curious Seed, Scotland), or the double bill by Arch 8 Dance Group (Netherlands). In each case, the target audience is the eight-plus age group but both offerings have the creative shine – and the sweat – you don't always see in contemporary dance-works for adults.

Out at Artspace in Craigmillar, the Dutch company delivered the kind of in-your-face physicality that makes audiences of all ages crane forward in near-disbelief. In My True North we watched (from the seating bank) as a couple were gradually drawn together as if magnetised. He might briefly break away, but she would lock in on him – and vice versa – as if their togetherness was an inevitability and their fast, athletic interactions and precise counter-balances were all down to unseen forces of attraction. Exhilarating stuff, but even so No Man is an Island took everyone by surprise. Especially since this second two-hander saw us on-stage, at thoroughly close quarters when company director Erik Kaiel was dragged, as if lifeless, into our midst. When a second man appeared, we reckoned it was A&E revival time. But no. He proceeded to walk all over Kaiel, as if he was a map or maybe a mat. Perhaps his barefoot balances were a form of acu- pressure, for Kaiel came to life, rising to an upright stance – with his fellow performer on his shoulders throughout. Wow!

Definitely not one to try at home, whereas Chalk About (devised and performed by Christine Devaney and Leandro Kees) is crammed with the kind of inspired gambits that can, and should, carry over into all kinds of merry games-play. To begin with, it looks fun: chalk outlines on the floor and white cut-outs (little and large), all in the shape of bodies and echoing the talk about identity that percolates through the movement. Both performers chat to us about themselves, their personal history, their likes and dislikes, with an affable honesty that is utterly engaging – but the real charm of their disclosures is where it takes young audiences in terms of thinking about how we all define ourselves, and how we make judgements about others based on appearances. There is a sophisticated, caringly-detailed process underpinning this generous-hearted show. Like the hidden depths in everyone, it's what makes us love it without analysing why, until afterwards.

Mise – Story of a Girl (Branar Teatar do Phaisti, Ireland) also makes its craft and charm look beguilingly simple. The nuanced manipulation of the sweet wee puppet Mise brings to life all her physical reactions and inner emotions when – having torn her new party frock – she cannot get to sleep for fretting. Live music on harp and flute helps shade in the moods as things take a turn for the bizarre. It is aimed at a six-plus audience, but many an adult readily identified with the cloud that hovered over Mise's anxious head.