

A Dancing British Brood in a Feast of Fancies

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Extract

The very best came from Sheffield ...

Charlotte Vincent (from Sheffield) is also a practitioner of physical theater, but with a far more disturbing emotional range. Her Broken Chords was about the most harrowing yet inspiring transmutation of personal pain into artistic achievement that I have encountered. As she said in her program notes and from the stage, her work was inspired by her excruciating divorce. By the end, every facet of her piece, which at times seemed so diverse as to be flying apart, had cohered into a statement about suffering, anger, grotesque humor and the possibility of rebirth.

Broken Chords began with a visually arresting tableau: rows upon rows of wooden chairs facing the audience. The performers (including Ms. Vincent, older than the others) entered in black, as if in mourning at a funeral. Mournful music, recorded and played live, suffused the scene: one of the title's many meanings is the necessity of arpeggiating chords in Baroque music on a modern violin. (Patrycja Kujawska, one of the dancers, is also a first-rate violinist.) It was all very, very sad, though we didn't quite know why.

Suddenly Ms. Vincent seized a microphone and broke the mood. Why was everyone so mopey? she demanded angrily. She wanted smiles and she wanted a love story. Then she pulled out a toy pistol and tried to make her depressed troupe look cheerful, with little success except for the ever-smiling Darren Anderson, who just wanted to be a star. This led to a seemingly disparate series of skits (flamenco dancing from Eleanor McDonald, who was injured during the performance but carried on; droll suicide attempts from Aurora Lubos).

And then, just as things seemed to be unravelling, Ms. Vincent got her love story after all, in two beautiful, touchingly yet sovereignly choreographed duets for herself and two of the men. The duets pulled everything back together, revealing the minimalist moping and the wacko humor and the thoughts of suicide as aspects of one woman overwhelmed by grief. But not so overwhelmed as to preclude her from making a great dance. One wonders what her ex-husband thought of it.'