

# Broken Chords, Lyceum Theatre, Sheffield

The Times, 20 February 2006, Donald Hutera

Charlotte Vincent is not the first artist to raid her own life for creative inspiration, nor will she be the last. Broken Chords, the latest full-length show that the Sheffield-based choreographer and director has made for Vincent Dance Theatre, is one of the more fascinating examples of this self-regarding genre in recent memory.

The production was conceived and crafted from the terrible wounds of Vincent's own messy separation and divorce. Unless you happen to read her programme note before the lights go down, you won't know this as you watch the piece's stunningly miserable opening section.

The setting is a neatly ordered field of wooden chairs. Above hangs a huge tangle of bare, amber-hued light bulbs. The eight performers, Vincent included, enter this sombre space as if each harbours the weight of the world in his or her bones. One sits playing an aching violin solo. Her mournful music is eventually overtaken by an alarming din that gets these emotional refugees going. They race between the chairs, vaulting over them like hunted gazelles. Their occasional moments of contact exhibit a violent, gnawing desperation. How much more of this exhausting punishment can they, or we, take? Suddenly Vincent herself stops the action. In a confessional pique she tells us that she's had enough gloom and doom. Here, too, she tips her artistic hand, transforming the impassioned personal anguish into a playful dark comedy of truth, artifice, recovery and redemption.

The remainder of the 90-minute performance slips easily between laughter and pain, loaded with clever but fairly familiar Brechtian devices and postmodern ironies. The show, like Vincent's life in the wake of loss, must go on even if it is continually interrupted by ridiculous humour or threatens to tip over into a carefully orchestrated chaos.

Broken Chords is brave, intelligent entertainment, although I couldn't shake the feeling that it was more important for Vincent to have made than for me to see. The multinational cast, including two musicians, is unflaggingly game and gifted.