

# Broken Chords, The Place, London

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For an audience forearmed with the knowledge that the show they are about to see is ninety minutes long with no interval, the opening of Vincent Dance Theatre's Broken Chords is daunting.

A sombre group – four men, four women – assemble one by one in what appears to be a church, with rows of wooden seats arranged like pews. No words are spoken; though grief hangs heavily in the air; a woman wordlessly comforts another, who begins to play a sad violin. The 'mourners' sit unmoving, the woman puts down her violin and utters a bitter, low-voiced litany of regret. We shift in our seats; are we facing 90 minutes of misery here? Then, unexpectedly, the mood changes; the eight mourners leap from their seats and begin what seems to be an energetic game of musical chairs dashing wildly between the rows and flinging themselves into the nearest seat when the music stops. Eventually all eight performers abandon the game and start to dance both singly and in pairs as the music – credited in the programme to Johann Sebastian Bach and Heinrich von Biber – grows wilder. The movement here is both exhilarating and daring; involving leaps between the rows of seats – the dancers have to judge the spaces they are vaulting so fearlessly.

Eventually, Ms. Vincent – who has been dancing as vigorously as the others – picks up the mike and barks orders with the aid of a gun, threatening death unless the f...ing chairs are cleared off the stage, pronto, and everyone better f...ing smile or else, as she's had enough of the f...ing long faces

Charlotte Vincent's company has been in existence since 1994 and its present roster of dancers is remarkable. It's unfair to pick out anyone in this excellent company, but both Lee Clayden and Janusz Orlik stood out for me; an extraordinary tender and tough duet for the two reminded me of some of Maliphant's work (the programme tells us that Broken Chords

was 'devised and performed' by all eight dancers, so it's impossible to identify who choreographed what, but I loved this piece).

Broken Chords is hilarious and sad all at once. Amongst all the action, a woman (Aurora Lubos) makes several incompetent attempts to kill herself by various means – once by pulling her skirt over her head and smoking frantically under it, and when this inexplicably fails, 'hanging' herself by attaching her leg to a chair, putting her head in a suitcase and kicking the chair away – amazingly, this attempt fails too.

The show is not without its faults – towards the end things take a turn towards the turgid; an over-extended duet between Ms Vincent and Lee Clayden tries our patience and reminds us that by now we've been in our seats for 80 minutes; her last 'meaningful' walk across the floor seems to take an eternity. But on the whole, Broken Chords is a witty, occasionally moving and thoroughly entertaining fusion of dance and theatre, and what was probably the most surprising thing about it was that the super-talented performers had created the whole of this satisfying work themselves. Cool.