

Punchdrunk, Gardner Arts Centre, Brighton

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Silence; Vincent Dance Theatre's *Punch Drunk* starts in silence. Patrycja Kujawska stands poised before a curtain draped opening, her ivory gown and feathered hat assign grandeur to a growing sense of vulnerability.

She looks like Clytemnestra in the Greek tragedy *Agamemnon* awaiting the horrors to come. A constant series of false entrances through the white curtains bring in touches of humour, but the sense of repetition creates a building tension. The balance of emotions created in the first few minutes is representative of the entire production.

Dance and music transcend language: they shake off its shackles and bear universal witness to the truth. This is why it is so hard to explain any good dance production; if it was so easily out into words it would have been play or novel. Essentially, the core themes here are sexuality and sex, mixed in with a dark sense of the tragic. If it is a work that contains fun, it is also a work that lacks hope for those caught within it.

There is an inevitability of sorrow for its character, as fleeting moments of joy are often tarnished by secrets and regret. There are undertones of sexual violence, flirtation, lust and a sense of cross gendering- where a man become woman and vice versa. The so-called norms are overturned and the petit-bourgeois fictions of common sense and decency are exposed to the light, where they will surely wilt. Most relationships here seem troubled and even dangerous, but they have authenticity. It is in the scenes of sexual violence and dark intent that the troubled undercurrents of society are revealed.

Musically, the production encompasses many elements including jazz, and classical. The quality of the dancing was superb, and all were well able to tackle the varied routines, solo and group dances, that challenged them. In addition they danced in character; their movements carried the kind of nuance usually conveyed by words. They conquered

language, and actually developed their identities as the production moved on. The choreography was stunning. This is a highly developed and intricate dance-based production. I have not seen work by Vincent Dance Theatre before, but I will surely do so again.