

Punchdrunk

The Stage, Kevin Berry

The set for Punch Drunk could serve as a background for a significant painting, perhaps a forgotten Lautrec. What we see is the backstage area of a disused theatre. Curtains, weighted ropes, chairs, rows of lights and numerous props from vaudeville and burlesque acts lie in disarray. The dancers are lost souls worn down by the hard work of dancing. They reveal fragments from half-forgotten performances and moments from real or imagined liaisons. Their apparent improvisations are whacky and wonderful. Their melancholy is touching and deeply personal.

Vincent Dance Theatre has always sought to push dance and theatre onto a collision course. There is no artistic aloofness with this company. The work is open and honest and the dancers take risks.

Punch Drunk's sketches and vignettes are all beautifully interwoven. Laughter, tears and regret go hand in hand. When Patrycja Kujawska performs a reluctant striptease her degradation is painful and is soon complete. Janusz Orlik dons high heels and becomes wistfully feminine in solo performed almost entirely on chair. TC Howard and Aurora Lubos argue furiously off stage. They enter dressed as innocent angels but are soon kicking and tearing into each other as though battling elves. This makes rich comedy. The fight becomes formalised, with a referee and scorer.

Punch Drunk makes ravishing, intensely sensual theatre. Its music is from Chopin and Bach with some jolly 'Magic Wurlitzer' from John Avery, the company's regular composer. Director Charlotte Vincent keeps the narrative strands simmering and the emotions raw.