

Punchdrunk, Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh

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Twenty-four hours after watching Forced Entertainment going to town with elements of vaudeville and rock gigs in *Bloody Mess*, I'm watching another Sheffield-based company- Vincent Dance Theatre- dipping their talented toes in faded burlesque, the Follies and 1930s cabaret with *Punch Drunk*. A founding member of Forced Ents- Richard Lowdon- has designed VDT's set, an assemblage of gauzy swathes, battered chairs and rudimentary dressing-rooms. Once onstage, however, Charlotte Vincent's ideas go their own way, thanks, in no small measure, to the versatility of the six performers. They don't just hoof it like variety troupers, they play musical instruments, throw in bursts of acrobatics and even take the ropes for some aerial work.

It adds up to all-out, hard-working 100 minutes of (mostly) high-speed activity. Which is where Vincent's underlying theme is to be found: for *Punch Drunk* is about the punishment meted out, and taken, in the name of entertainment. When TC Howard and Aurora Lubos first arrive onstage, they're scrapping like two harum-scarum kids. As the show progresses, both will suffer abusive treatment from the man in the group and will be forced to do turns that have no dignity and are unpleasant: Lubos in swimsuit, getting soaked by a "waterfall" in an aquatic ballet, is but one example. Are they ghosts, in some cyclical limbo? Or fallen stars, trying to recapture glory? Why do they put themselves through hell, yet come up smiling? It's a fierce, dark, yet edgily- funny production from a multi-talented, multi-national company celebrating 10 successful years of the show going on, regardless.