

Punchdrunk, Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh

The Scotsman, 15 November 2004, Kelly Apter

The fading grandeur of vaudeville and burlesque forms the backdrops of Vincent Dance Theatre's tenth anniversary show. Aerial artistes, slapstick clowns, fishnet-wearing strippers—they're all here, hanging on by their fingernails to a profession in decline. At turns silly (a manic game of musical chairs) and poignant (a heartbreaking strip tease by an unwilling showgirl) Punch Drunk isn't afraid to make a mess to prove its point. By the end the floor is littered with confetti, pools of water, feathers and performers who refuse to give up even if the rest of the world has moved on.

As for the real-live dancers, all six bring an infectious humour and technical prowess to their performance. A ballet routine by a man dressed in a tutu may look comical, but the moves themselves are beautifully executed. So too the aerial work, used sparingly to good effect. Characters such as these are theatrical gold dust, tugging at the heartstrings with their unrequited enthusiasm. But Punch Drunk achieved this on very few occasions, finding more success with showy old-style dance routines that carried a more superficial appeal. And like so many productions, it was just too long, taking ten minutes to make a statement when five would do. Shave 30 minutes off, and this show might pack genuine punch.