

Charlie Chaplin's granddaughter does him proud in 'Murmurs'

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July 26, 2013 | 4:00am



Aurélia Thiérrée in "Murmurs."

Photo: Richard Haughton

Charlie Chaplin would be proud: The Lincoln Center Festival's "Murmurs," conceived and directed by his daughter Victoria Thiérrée Chaplin and starring his granddaughter Aurélia Thiérrée, is so brilliantly devised and performed that it's easy to forgive its occasional lapses.

The nearly wordless, surrealistic piece begins with a young woman (Thiérrée) in red high heels packing up her possessions in an apartment full of cardboard boxes.

Soon, strange things start happening.

She folds herself into one box, only to emerge from another. She's swallowed up in a sea of bubble wrap, which transforms itself into a yeti-like creature that embraces her. The moving men helping her don doctor-like white coats, which suggests she may be on her way to an asylum.

The scene shifts to a Venice-like setting in which Thiérrée leaps through the building's facades while being pursued by spectral puppet figures, including one with bellows for a head. The dreamlike tableaux that follow feature two male performers: dancer Jaime Martinez, lithe and graceful, and circus acrobat Magnus Jakobsson, who shines in a slapsticky scene that has him knocking himself silly with a wooden table.

But this is Chaplin's granddaughter's show, and she is wonderful — appearing and reappearing amid the tumult in the most unexpected ways. She transforms herself with the simplest of props, at one point becoming an exotic creature just by placing a handbag on her head. Whether hanging from a clothesline, appearing to drown in a churning sea composed of billowing fabrics, or literally dancing on air, she's an enchanting presence.

"Murmurs," with its atmospheric, Philip Glass-like score, is very much like a dream in its twisty logic and nonsensical digressions. Meanings are elusive. Not everything works, and it feels long despite its brief running time — but its haunting imagery will linger long in your imagination.