

## THEATRE

*by Matt Dobie*

*Photo by Richard Haughton*

***Murmurs*** is a surreal journey into a world where inanimate objects come to life, faceless figures roam the stage, and people can dance on air. It's a one-of-a-kind theatre experience filled with visual tricks that enchant and bewilder. Objects appear and disappear. Set pieces come to life. People vanish. It becomes almost a game inside the show, asking yourself, "How the hell did they do that?" and trying to figure it out.

It is all achieved through low-tech artistry: sleight of hand, puppetry, innovative set and costume design. How these tricks were conceived is beyond me.

The narrative is difficult to define because it is difficult to decipher. It begins with our heroine, played by Aurélia Thierrée, alone in a room filled with cardboard boxes, loose plastic debris, and other small knickknacks. It becomes apparent that construction workers are tearing the building down and need her to leave. But soon after this realization, we follow her into a world of lost loves, institutionalization,

and lonely ruminations, where time and reality are mysteries. Is it her past come to life? Is it all just simply imagined? So much is left up to interpretation—in a good way.

However indiscernible the narrative may be at times, the emotions are real. There are moments of palpable sadness and serene beauty. We are with her in her isolation and loneliness, and also when she embraces a lover. For all its astounding visual wizardry, this play could not sustain itself without connecting emotionally. And it certainly does that.

It is very playful as well, with a hefty dose of slapstick. Considering the person behind *Murmurs* is renowned circus performer Victoria Thierrée Chaplin, the daughter of Charlie Chaplin, perhaps I should have expected a show that balances physical humor with emotional depth and does it all so successfully with very little dialogue.

The set, costume, and lighting designs are truly awe-inspiring. Rooms with self-peeling walls, an ocean of whirling objects, characters suddenly transforming into animals. And the lighting cannot go unheralded. So much of this show revolves around the illusions, many of which couldn't be done to perfection without a precise lighting

design, exposing just the necessary bit of stage and never more.

Although it is only an hour and fifteen minutes in length, it probably could have been pruned down a bit. There are some scenes that become repetitive and don't really contribute to the piece as a whole. The narrative doesn't have forward momentum carrying us to a climax, so any ancillary scenes slightly weigh down the performance. And for all the astounding trickery that leaves the audience in awe, there are some illusions that are more obviously achieved, and—when measured against the bewildering effects—fall flat.

That being said, it is an enriching experience. It is eerie, it is fun, it is thought provoking. Perhaps not perfection, but the trickery will keep you guessing and engrossed, and the emotions are real, revealed with nuance and depth. It's a show that's a joy to interpret.

*Upcoming performances: Sunday, May 28<sup>th</sup> at 3pm,  
Monday, May 29<sup>th</sup> at 2pm and 7pm.*

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