

● The unreal world of Aurelia Thierree

Theatre

Aurelia's Oratorio

Lyric Hammersmith, London

★★★★☆

Victoria Thierree Chaplin's world is as white and black as snow on earth — and as red as blood. It is an upside-down, inside-out world of reversals and altered states. A place of clocks and whistles where time and people disappear, coats wrestle and dispatch their owner, dresses twitch and dance alone, limbs take on a life of their own as if a poltergeist has taken over the stage.

This is a rackets backstage world, a place of plush red velvet curtains, illusion and such sweet disillusion that

the stage itself disintegrates. If Salvador Dalí or Lewis Carroll's white rabbit hurried by, either would be perfectly at home here, stopping only to stare in amazement at a twinkling, puffing engine passing through the human body. Tarry too long and you will find the show's star Aurelia Thierree (Chaplin's daughter) dissolving, as if into the very sands of time.

Thierree is an elegant waif with impossibly flexible limbs and a great line in sleight of hand. She does wonder wonderfully, and at the same time she always lets you know that it is only a trick, that you should not believe your eyes. Theatre is all about the suspension of disbelief: Thierree takes things one step further; she makes you think that you

have seen what you have not seen. Then she gleefully destroys the theatre itself. What might have been fey is suddenly brutal.

It is a dangerous strategy but she pulls it off. There are occasional longeurs, and perhaps the piece relies a little too heavily on the music for its impact. But it is a bewitching 70 minutes in which the nightmarish and the dreamy meet and disintegrate in a puff of smoke and the whistle of a train.

Lyn Gardner

Until April 16. Box office: 08700 500 511. Then touring.