

## Theatre Murmurs Queen Elizabeth Hall

★★★★☆

Aurélia Thierrée and her director (and mother) Victoria Chaplin Thierrée are artful conjurers inviting us into surreal theatrical dreamscapes full of unique charm and sleight-of-hand poetry. Their first collaboration, an often delightful, delicate flight of fancy called *Aurélia's Oratorio*, was twice seen in London as part of an extensive international tour. Driven by notions of illusory perception, psychological fragility and evanescent romance, this second production is equally enchanting but possesses a greater emotional resonance.

Lasting about 70 minutes, *Murmurs* supplies a constant stream of imaginative surprises carried along on a subtly poignant undercurrent. A lot of it depends upon Aurélia Thierrée's presence and immense yet quiet skills as a performer. Thin and big-eyed, this young woman exudes an aura both vaguely glamorous and vulnerable.

We first see her surrounded by cardboard boxes and bubble wrap as a pair of professional removals men rush



DONALD COOPER/PHOTOSTAGE

### Sweet dreams: Aurélia Thierrée invites the audience into a surreal world

on and off. But from where, and to what, is she going? Plainly she's living on the edge in a world that, despite its contemporary familiarity, also feels strangely antique.

The French title of the show translates, tellingly, as "Murmurs of Walls". Here nothing is trustworthy,

everyday objects seem to have wills of their own and transformation is the norm. Examples are steady and numerous. Some involve puppetry, while many others are accomplished with curtains or strings. Does it matter if sometimes we see the latter being pulled? No. The performance is

sustained by its own internal, DIY logic.

A bubble-wrapped ladder changes from a looming, roughly modern-day steed to an enveloping alien. Using only a scarf, two brooches and a fragment of lino, Thierrée herself becomes a turtle-like creature. Walking before a photograph of what could be the grounds of a sanatorium, the backdrop strolls with her. Later she nearly drowns in a sea of purple velvet that is patently a tiered machine, and yet we believe her distress.

There's a lovely duet with just a touch of old-style Hollywood magic about it when Thierrée seems to dance on air. The compact, fleet-footed Jaime Martinez is her perfect partner. Magnus Jakobsson is equally fine as another, deceptively clumsy man pursuing and trying to rescue this elusive female from her ephemeral demons. Imperfect it may be, but altogether this serio-comic portrait of a mental disturbance is an elaborate and beautiful enigma that ends, appropriately, in a puff of smoke.

**Donald Hutera**

**Box office: 0844 8479910, to Jan 2**