

# Dance Review: Fray, Cottier's Theatre, Glasgow

Sunday 28 June 2015

Fray, Cottier's Theatre, Glasgow

Mary Brennan ,

FOUR STARS

Last Friday, the Cottier Dance Project ended a week of richly varied programming in a blaze of brilliance with the premiere of Fray. Throughout the week a recurring theme had been the partnering up of movement and live music - an all-too-rare occurrence, especially outwith the national dance companies. For Fray, it was Daniel's Beard at the music stands: performing works by Christopher Rathbone, Nadia Boulanger and Penderecki with a finesse that went sympathetically hand-in-foot with choreographer Diana Loosmore's creative invention while retaining the integrity of the scores themselves.

Loosmore's new work had, at its core, the behavioural facets encompassed by the phrase "flight or flight" - not just the physical stances of defensive-aggression or self-preserving bursts of sprinting speed, but the internal conflicts that seethe with indecision over staying or going when relationships turn awkward. One overall concept, then, but - in responding to the very different moods and tone colours of the music - three very different (if inter-linked) pieces with the five members of High Heart Dance Company, impressively agile and spirited in expressing the dynamic shifts within the movement.

With three of the company - including the lone male - all in black, and the other two women in pale tops, the eye could easily pick up on the oppositional undertow that tugged even when limbs were interlocking in intense duets. Thrillingly pliant bodies spoke of tensions and attractions, wariness and resolve as friskiness shaded into calm (Rathbone's Daniel's Razor), or limpid sweeps of cello and piano turned jazzy (Boulanger's Trois Pieces) before Penderecki's Sextet introduced shards of brassy swagger offset by swithers of wary musings. Memorable for all the best reasons - and a personal triumph for dancer Freya Jeffs who also curated the whole Dance Project.

# TVBOMB

## Review: Fray

### The Cottier Theatre: The Cottier Chamber Project

Glasgow, Fri 26 June 2015

Alice Elms

FIVE STARS

The Cottier Chamber Project is a relatively new addition to Glasgow's lively calendar of smaller arts festivals. Both innovative and fast-growing, it gives a welcome platform for Scottish based dancers and musicians to showcase diverse chamber pieces in the perfectly suited, intimate setting of Cottier's Theatre. Partly owing to its many nascent side-shoots this year – an extensive exploration of Lieder in the Hunterian Museum, jazz and world music, a photography exhibition – 'small' may no longer be an accurate description of its scope. Most excitingly, the opportunities the festival creates for groups of musicians and dancers to collaborate, rehearse and perform together, show a commitment to a broad and imaginative style of planning.

In this closing Music and Dance Chamber piece, Fray, the sort of thrillingly ambitious choreography and collaboration this curatorial style gives rise to ambles sure-footedly into the bewitched audience's sightlines. The rudiments are not huge, though colourful enough to pique curiosity: six instrumentalists at the back of the floor (Daniel's Beard, comprising violin, viola, cello, clarinet, horn, piano), five dancers of the High Heart Dance Company (costumed as a 2 versus 3 pairing), a weighty musical programme, and 'fight or flight' as choreographic theme.

Things certainly do fly, as the music of the first two composers – Christopher Rathbone and Nadia Boulanger – inspire a less agitated, more graceful dance than the theme conspires to suggest. A playful ostinato-like choreographic configuration has all five dancers bobbing to the same curious step, until duos and trios throw down new avenues for exploration. With the husky tones of Boulanger's harmony and gentler instrumentation (played with zeal by Liivi Arder and Sonia Cromarty) some duos become altogether softer and more sensual.

But the guttural fight and flight dimensions are brought spluttering to the foreground with the music of Krzysztof Penderecki, whose Sextet's skittish repetitions and flighty themes most closely mirror thematic expectations. The

sheer scale of the work's ambitions becomes clear at this point: with the variety of motivic material, the length of the music, and the continuing complexity of much of the choreography, it's difficult to say why it doesn't fall into incomprehensibility.

A steady flow of intriguing detail eddies smoothly into the dance; arms flicking up in an un-dancerly way, like a tension-releasing tick, the support of a duo partnership played out in shadowed remembrance, strangely awkward lifts, lifts with gorgeously elegant lines, floor-based sequences that spring up to powerful squats and much more. Even as an elemental horn call sneaks in from the back of the theatre (the horn player is required to change location mid-proceedings) Diana Loosmore is still rooting for more dance vocabulary. The neuroticism of these fragments is carefully controlled, so often tapering into something warmer and more playful, even during the Penderecki. While the mood strains in different directions, somehow the parts cohere.

Each of the five dancers has unique strengths, and Loosmore crafts their parts (and pairs them) accordingly. Their timing is also impeccable, with miraculous delays in unison parts sculpting motion so that it fits the ends of musical phrases like perfectly tailored clothing.

Fray is a bold, graceful and refreshingly complex work. The packed theatre and rapturous and lengthy applause spell one message to The Cottier Chamber Project for next year: Glasgow is eager for more.