

Performance pieces disturb, irritate, nag, repel, attract but then repel again. Drew Bird's one man performance " The Host" presented at the European Federation of Dramatherapy , April 29th 2018 did all of that.

The piece was done with an almost bare stage- a chair, some lights. Drew, wearing a dark brown wig, smeared red lipstick smudged sloppily around his lips, and a dark ill-fitting suit, came on stage and immediately captured the audience with a forced welcome in the vein of an old music hall entertainer-- welcome, welcome with all bonhomie but that classic distancing that is so apparent with performance pieces.

Throughout the production Drew repeated phrases, physical gestures, gestures that carried meanings as signs of public and private experience. Eventually segments of the entire show spun into a painfully intense spiral. Many of the repetitive phrases became more anxious, more desperate- "where is she now, she should be here by now", and the information that someone is tied, tied to a tree. Though we, as the audience, don't know who these people are, we know that the menace is increasing.

Later as Drew's character Frank devolves, there seeps in a complex sexuality leading to an aggressive/rhythmic strip. Though it was just the shoulders of his jacket yet that seemed sufficient to set a confused sexual and gender tone, less pornographic and more dangerous as if there was a rape to come. The exaggeration, the enticing but peculiar rhythm of arms and chest made the suggestiveness ugly- more a moment of me too than anything else.

When Frank , sits in a chair , tied up and invites his assaulter to hit him, to hurt him the whole experience turns dark . It seemed to me first like an S and M film. But then Frank's conversion in desperation to an appeal to be killed, strangled becomes almost too much/and simultaneously hackneyed as if taken from a 1960s movie about the Kray twins. And then the phrase "resume the positions" and the tighter/tauter spiral down began again.

I am always as interested in the audience as the play. It was clear that many in the audience were having trouble converting the end of the festival with the darkness/strangeness/desperation of the character Frank. The children and parents left and the audience eventually became a rump of engaged people perhaps, like me, almost hypnotised by the speeding repetitions and the increasing desperation. I would have liked to have seen this piece juxtaposed with one of the workshops on border/terror. Salut to the chef for his courage in acting and mounting this piece.

John Bergman