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Hangman ★★★★★



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THE SCOTSMAN
Fri 17 Aug 2007

Hangman

JOYCE MCMILLAN

ASSEMBLY AURORA NOVA (VENUE 8)

IMAGINE a mid-20th-century world of gangsters and gangsters' molls, of men who gamble with their own lives and those of others, and of a brutal judicial system heavily influenced by the pounding presses of the popular media.

This is the world of Hangman, the latest show from the wonderful DO-Theatre, once of St Petersburg, now based in Germany. And although the setting is familiar - think of the musical Chicago, reimagined through the sinister mechanics of a children's game, and touched with the mood of Brecht's Mahagonny - it provides Evgeny Kozlov and his inspired company with material for an outstandingly beautiful and thought-provoking show, even by their own high standards.

On the soaring dark stage of the main Aurora Nova auditorium, stunningly lit by company member Alexander Bondarev, the four familiar bowler-hatted figures create unforgettable image after image in retelling their story of crime and punishment.

Sometimes their style is Chaplinesque, sometimes touched by film noir. There are gangsters' molls physically trapped in the embrace of the big "suits" who own them, lawyers grandstanding in court, and always, under the swinging lights of the nightclubs and gaming tables, the rattle of a typewriter, and images of a civilisation trapped in the words it prints about itself.

There is the odd awkward moment, and some of the dance sequences spin out for too long after their point is made. But the quality of the movement is often breathtaking. And the whole show represents a magnificent masterclass for Festival-goers in what theatre is and can be - a feast of light, beauty and movement for all of the senses, turning theatrical space into a magical field of ideas and dreams, and creating a whole world so successfully that when the company take their bow, after 70 minutes, it's difficult to believe that only five performers have done so much, and carried us so far.

- Until 25 August. Today 7.45pm

Hangman

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