

Accidental Collective: here is where we meet

in Reviews | by Sarah Davies |

Tags: Accidental Collective



This cleverly devised production from the Marlowe Studio's first resident company seeks to deconstruct and explore memory and inheritance through visual metaphor, direct address and imagined meetings with long-dead relatives. The stimuli is John Berger's semi-autobiographical book *Here is Where We Meet*, a disparate narrative which travels across Europe as the elderly protagonist 'John'

reflects on his life by experiencing similar meetings. This inter-textual influence is clear throughout the show, providing a compelling hook to hang memories upon.

Accidental Collective are a company well known across Kent for producing innovative and experimental work, and this production contains much stimulus for reflection and some moving moments. The piece opens in a cramped house constructed of fabric walls and containing dusty-looking vintage paraphernalia, as yet unpacked – fertile ground in which to discover things mislaid and overlooked. Some lovely moments include walls being torn down both literally and in the character's memories, and some imaginative interweaving of Berger's poetic text with devised content. This is important new work to occur in a region still largely dominated by more traditional or conservative theatrical fare, so I would have liked to see a little more risk-taking in terms of the creative production of the piece. The visual aesthetic is strong but could perhaps have been pushed further at points, particularly in the use of slide projections and by fully utilising the interesting set-up.

There is an interesting gamble, as acknowledged in the programme notes, with a younger company attempting to bring to life the memories and experiences of a much older person, looking forward as the character himself looks back. It is a gamble that in the main pays off well, creating some exciting moments facilitated by sensitive characterisation and well-staged scenes. The scenes concerning Berger's 'meetings' are performed mostly by Emma Darlow and Kascion Franklin, newer additions to the company who have clearly engaged well with the text. Darlow in particular creates an absorbing and believable character as John's long-dead mother. Kascion seems a little less focused at times, losing a few lines but still showing solid potential.

Daisy Orton and Pablo Pakula (two founding members of the company) are consummate performers whose open address to the audience about their memories of lost relatives is very well framed and delivered. I was most absorbed by Pakula's lyrical take on his grandmother's death and the mind's tendency to confabulation – constructing false memories to fill in the gaps. There is a risk that this style of address however can seem self-indulgent after a while, a fact that the performers themselves acknowledge. There were moments when I felt the narrative straying a little in this direction, but it was pulled back quite quickly and interspersed with some diverse scenes. In this, the company have achieved their aim of creating a 'meeting place' for memories and reflection, both on stage and in the spectator's mind. In some senses *here is where we meet* is a fragmented and complex piece, but this is surely the point, reflecting as it does the nature of memory and contemplation. It did indeed prompt me to reflect on my own experiences and inheritance as well as what has passed, and some moments created stayed with me long after the production had finished.

<http://totaltheatre.org.uk/accidental-collective-here-is-where-we-meet/>