

There Ought To Be Clowns

Don't bother, I'm here...

MONDAY, 6 DECEMBER 2010

Review: Cart Macabre, Old Vic Tunnels



"Keep your hands inside the cart..."

Two years in the making, Living Structures' immersive theatre show [Cart Macabre](#) takes over the Old Vic Tunnels for December and it is thanks to the lovely, ever-hard-working Jake at [A Younger Theatre](#) (a highly

recommended site) who let me know about this show in good time to grab tickets before they quickly sold out. Mining a similar furrow to shows like [You Me Bum Bum Train](#), it mixes the concepts of theatre and installation to create something unique, in this case, a nightmarish ghost train ride through the cavernous space under Waterloo.

After emptying our pockets and being given personalised luggage labels, we're wheeled off into the dark, one by one, on individual flat wheelbarrows by silent cast members dressed in sailors' uniforms: it's a slightly unnerving and highly effective beginning as we're then guided onto carts in the pitch black as a haunting voice fill the air and splits into a multitude of harmonies. Somewhat disorientated, the four-person carts then start to move and the journey begins.

We're then taken on a voyage through a succession of theatrical vignettes, animations, performance art pieces, videos, shadow puppetry, all revealed to us through peepholes and shutters, as the carts rocket round the space in the Old Vic Tunnels, sometimes feeling like it is a train on tracks, sometimes wheeling round in circles, at one point evoking the movement of floating entirely convincingly. We become voyeur, victim, viewer, complicit yet exposed as the heavy symbolism of death, limbo and the afterlife envelops us, bodies descend from above into the carts, our belongings float pass in plastic bags, masked figures poke and prod in a twisted take on a carnival. Everything is held together through the highly affecting use of song: mournful folk melodies, redolent of the sea, echo around, with solos and beautifully harmonious choruses floating by.

It was all really rather well done, the whole approach is so disorientating that one really doesn't know what to anticipate next. The quality of the experiences varied somewhat but the level of expectation was always nerve-tingling as the unexpectedness of so much that happens never really dissipates. The cart hurtles with such



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3. When The Rain Stops Falling
4. Hello, Dolly!
5. La Cage Aux Folles
6. A Streetcar Named Desire
7. Arcadia
8. Enron
9. Sweet Charity
10. Priscilla Queen of the Desert



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force at some points that the woman next to me was clinging onto my arm for dear life, despite us having never met nor able to see each other's face. Once it finishes, there is the opportunity to walk around the performance space with the lights on and to discover how the magic was carried out. It is nicely illuminating and in a couple of cases highly revelatory (I couldn't believe how simply the 'floating' was done, given how effective it was).

Cart Macabre is sold out now, but I would say it is well worth keeping an eye out for returns as it is huge amounts of fun. I'm not entirely convinced of how strongly a narrative was developed or the true depth it achieves given the time taken to move between sections, but I think it is actually stronger for this. As a multi-sensory thrill, as a fairground ride into the dark unknown, it delivers a highly enjoyable experience, especially to those new to immersive theatre, and is certainly the best thing I've seen in the Old Vic Tunnels this year.

Running time: 90 minutes (no interval)

Programme cost: free cast sheet available

Booking until 22nd December

Note: some strobe lighting and not one for those afraid of small dark spaces! And you are asked to surrender all your possessions into a plastic bag before boarding which is fine, but my friend's iPhone was returned to him with a cracked screen so maybe keep a hold of your phone...

PS: if by chance you have a spare ticket, then please contact [this laydee](#) as due to the forced rescheduling that we had to do, she missed out on coming with us

Posted by Ian at [15:36](#)

Labels: [Living Structures](#), [Old Vic Tunnels](#)

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