

Bahok

Akram Khan Company and the National Ballet of China

(Reviewed at The Birmingham Rep, 14th May 2008)

This was a dance show so it is perhaps converse to start by praising the music, by composer Nitin Sawhney. I had heard of Sawhney but never heard the music of this prestigious DJ, producer and composer etc before and was truly astounded. It was modern and intense, it had shades of all the different countries explored throughout the dance show, it was subtle and poignant but most powerful when it sounded like it could even work within a club and you were desperate to join the dancers on stage and get involved in the rhythms. I digress.

Back to the dance. The stage opens with very little atmosphere. We are shown, it appears, an airport waiting room with eight different people, waiting for their journeys. A large board overhead clicks as the numbers and letters change, as the passengers wait with frustration through delays and cancellations. The dancers were from a range of different nationalities: from the Chinese National Ballet and from the Slovakian to the Indian dancers from the Akram Khan Company.

This is not simply a dance piece but a piece with a message. Essentially the theme is cultural identity and how we carry memories of our identity and home wherever we go. There is also a theme of cultural clashes, but an electrifying dance ensemble at the end builds to a collective group hug by the passengers at the end- a message of hope perhaps that despite our differences, we are all more powerful when we collaborate and unite.

Fabiana Piccioli, a dancer from the Akram Khan Company steals the show. She is a traveller who has lost her identity and cannot remember where she is from or where she is going to. She is isolated from the rest of the dancers, who are certain of their identity, and her hysteric behaviour translates into a dance sequence which is raw and painful to watch. There is an energy as she throws her body at the floor, again and again, which speaks of the self destructiveness and the frustration we encounter when we lose our identity- a hint perhaps that in the modern world of globalisation and travel, we risk losing ourselves.

Throughout the dance, choreographed by Akram Kham, was inventive and lyrical. It varied between traditional ballet and fast, modern moves. The ensemble piece at the end was a delight and a climax to the piece; I only longed for a few more throughout the show.

This is not a quiet or traditional show. It is genuinely tense to watch and challenges you to interpret the scenes before you, while providing some fantastically innovative music and dance pieces.

Bahok can also be seen at Sadler's Wells from June 11-14 2008.