

De Quincey Co: ghostings

Keith Gallasch

A drunk, gesticulating with his beer bottle, repeatedly yells "Fuck the...what the...?" at the big pulsing screen with its speedy mix of pre-recorded and live feeds. Only occasionally he takes rare notice of the dagsters who slo-mo swarm about him on their hour long, voguing weave through a contemplative audience stretched out on the grass beneath stars blurred by bushfire haze. Some are like picknickers with their eskies and kids, some in proud Gay Games team clusters. Others are bypassers, more than momentarily seduced by these odd sirens who look less a danger to the audience than to themselves in their obsessive-compulsive staggerings and bizarre fashion model posturings on wire mesh podia that they drag about with them. The drunk is on the edge of the crowd, barely heard, but a security guard hovers, iterating, "I told you, no swearing", as four-letter abuse words slide across the screens and leap from the argumentative exchanges that envelope us in Barbara Clare's engrossing dance club musical score. "What?" the drunk rallies, his sense of justice wounded, "But this...this's homos!!" The guard looms, the drunk retreats into his bottle.

You can slip in and out of **Shiver**, as it moves close by and into the distance, the gaggle of performers followed by video cameras, photographers and the manipulators of portable lighting, like a media pageant or a fashion shoot. Or you switch to the screen, or shut your eyes and go with the music. Whatever, it does have a curious grip, sending even the odd shiver up the spine as the performers surround you, whispering with the soundtrack, "I'm alright. Are you alright?", hanging over you with a curiously langorous urgency like half out-of-it Kings Cross junkies caught between the pleasures of the last hit and the need for the next. They are almost stylish in their ragbag collection of wigs, high-high heels and dense makeup, for all the world drag queens. But the duration of the performance and the proximity to the performers allows you to fix on these faces to do your own bit of obsessing about what's under the makeup, what's glimpsed beneath the clothes, what's behind the voices. Four of them are women, but the longest-legged, a most elegant if uncertain mover, says someone afterwards, "is a boy." You can still be surprised, even at this late date. Two of the group are counter-tenors in long blonde wigs. They often frame the action, moving slowly through the crowd, the meeting of their long locks providing a curiously ritualistic climax to an inexplicable, often hypnotic event. The pre-recorded video makes much of their tresses. The 4 who dance vary their formula slightly track to track, performing with conviction (sometimes on the edge of parody), regrouping, slowly forming exotic tableaux vivant, and loping to the stage (a walk reminiscent of the latest horsey ambulations of fashion models, the soundtrack complementing it with

solo neighing) where they briefly line up to make a stage act.

I can imagine **Shiver** making a greater impact in a dance club—where it would be another, if subversive, part of the overall ambience—rather than in a city park on a balmy evening where it is entirely responsible for creating the requisite atmosphere and where its audience can only observe and are unlikely to move. Nor is its duration and minimalist variation right for theatre spaces, unlike the earlier parts of the trilogy. Nonetheless, the furious drive of the live editing of the intersecting double video projections pitted against the slower, possessed movements of the performers, the quality calibre of the sound system and the in-ear realism of the vocal recording, and the conviction of the performers make for a sometimes engrossing and curiously memorable experience. But what exactly was the experience? While the multimedia dimension of the show had a thoroughly contemporary feel (the projection of gnostic texts aside), the rest was like virtual reality display in a museum visit: not to say that its protagonists were stuffed, on the contrary, but they read like the detritus of glam rockery and 80s new romanticism, prisoners of the clichés of cross-dressing, but with fervour still, over and above an air of pathos and faded brilliance.

De Quincey Co, **Shiver**, November 7 & 8, The Hub Hyde Park.