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Engrossing kaleidoscope of dance, sight and sound

DE QUINCEY: NERVE 9
Reviewed by Jill Sykes

Performance Space, May 23

It is a solo dance work, but *De Quincey: Nerve 9* is generously endowed with collaborative elements that blend with unusual fluency and intensity to create an inspiringly integrated multi-art form presentation.

Tess de Quincey, dancemaker and performer, is the driving force behind the piece as well as out front. In a curious combination of scungy black clothes – cheap plastic raincoat worn back-to-front, trackie trousers ending above the ankle and joggers – she delivers movement that is refined to an essence and delicately detailed.

A program handsomely designed by Gail Priest illustrates the elements of the “dance score in nine movements” with sound compositions by Debra Petrovitch, sound and visual poems by Amanda Stewart, text by Francesca da Rimini, digital visual manipulation by Richard Manner and a range of

audio-visual editing, digital imaging and video composition by Russell Emerson.

Words and diagrams give a clue to the performance sources, but the reality is in the viewing: an engrossing, ever-changing sequence of moods in dance, visuals and sound.

The infinitely flexible Performance Space is unadorned. In the empty darkness a pale beam of light just catches the top of de Quincey’s cropped, straw-coloured hair. That’s all we see for a long time.

When the lighting expands to take in the outline of her face and shoulders, breathing is the only action. When movement begins, de Quincey’s feet merely trace the circumference of their original position as her body takes on a disconcerting lean before twisting with fidgety gestures that fit the sound.

Advancing along a diagonal beam of light, de Quincey opens up the performance, which is marked by familiar butoh-based vocabulary and bound by butoh’s intense inner concentration, yet moves forward in a

more expansive way. Her choreography and its accompaniments interact creatively.

With each section comes a change of visuals that transform the look and feel of the piece. The lips of women in close-up speak in languages other than English; later their eyes look, silently but meaningfully. Scattered words, some reversed, are projected on to the performing area. They also appear as graphic design. Blurred horizontals give way in part to verticals. Images of fire and boiling clouds suggest volcanoes and the burning of oil wells in Iraq.

Nothing goes on too long in this spare yet richly layered presentation. Interpretations are open to the viewer. Stewart’s extraordinary poetry mostly carries its meaning in sound rather than audible words, which makes this enigmatic way of seeing and hearing an exhilarating trigger to the imaginative senses – and it’s in performance only until Sunday.