

Subtle exploration of emotions inspired by ancient style

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Jill Sykes

Reviewer's rating: 3.5 out of 5 stars



Esoteric ... Tess de Quincey and Victoria Hunt in *Framed*. Photo: Heidrun Lohr

Reviewer rating: ★★★★★ Reader rating: None yet.

FRAMED

Riverside Theatres, August 8

Until tomorrow

THE title of *Framed* describes it. All the audience sees of Tess de Quincey and Victoria Hunt is their heads and shoulders, surrounded by a gilt frame about a metre wide. The action over nearly an hour consists of their slow movements within the constricted space and changing expressions inspired by the ancient Indian performance treatise, the *Natyasastra*.

The slowness of the movement, which makes it almost imperceptible, comes from the Japanese *butoh* core of their *Body Weather* movement style. If you have seen pure *butoh*, you will know how extraordinary it can be - and it is here. The two heads change sides and levels, move high and low within the space, into one corner or another, seamlessly and so slowly you might wonder how they got there.

This is one in a series of long-term and varied explorations by the De Quincey Co of elements of the *Natyasastra*, in which a range of emotions is projected: love, pity, anger, disgust, heroism, awe, terror and comedy. In Indian classical dance, this would be dramatic in the extreme; in this contemporary form of Japanese dance language it is the opposite, a subtle response to inner feelings.

So there is not a huge amount of change in facial expression, which is a pity. The sound by Michael Toisuta, while lively and interesting in its interrupted clock-ticking *Homage to Ligeti*, does not offer much aural variation. The main interest, for me, is the bravura technical skill involved in both the slowness and how they position their (out-of-sight) torsos and limbs to achieve the visible impact.

This is similar to what I felt about an earlier version, *Guilt Frame*, except in that piece there seemed to be more diversity. It was not only that the performers were male and female (de Quincey with Peter Snow) but their approaches to the task, with different material, had enough contrast to spark greater animation.

Especially if you did not see the previous offering, *Framed* is an esoteric piece worth catching, a collector's item.