

When a marathon becomes a moving experience

FRINGE DANCE

Mary Brennan

IF, IN the course of the Fringe, you see someone with a snazzy red, white and blue badge proclaiming "give dance a chance" then, chances are, they've been to Dance Base. There, until Sunday, you can pick and choose from no fewer than 10 different shows. Those with curiosity and a degree of stamina can cram a remarkably diverse array of styles (and personalities) into a day-long marathon. The effect is draining and exhilarating: but for those who'd like to take things at a less intense pace, here are the pieces I would have hated to miss, and some thoughts on others that, while never being less than interesting, were not as sure-footed.

Rites (★★★★) always looked good on paper. Anthony Missen and Kevin Turner had a shared history that harked back to training days and to a stint with Scottish Dance Theatre before they both headed off in separate directions. Now, as Company Chameleon, they're back on-stage in a duet about male identity that makes expressive use of their ongoing camaraderie, and the lovely unforced rapport that underpins the athletic strengths of their movement vocabulary. Bruising conflicts between fathers and sons, between brothers and between boyhood friends are not, in themselves, new grounds for dance.

What Missen and Turner bring to the tussles and the bonding is a perceptive understanding of touch – be it the rebuff of a slap, the offensive of a punch, the reassurance of a hand-clasp in the face of battle terrors or in the aftermath of disillusion or disappointment. Intelligently structured, nicely detailed and danced with an energy that is sincere rather than flashy, Rites is a class act (and a total steal at the across-the-board ticket price of a fiver).

Pere Faura's solo, *This is a picture of a person I don't know* (★★★★) is so hugely engaging, so charming and entertaining, you don't necessarily expect it to have such a profound and thoughtful

subtext. But as Faura hoofs and high kicks along to the try-out numbers from *A Chorus Line* – and, boy, he is a helluva snazzy mover – he starts musing on love, and how finding Mr Right is maybe like a dance audition where you offer up what it is you think they/he might want. He sweetly shimmies this into a reflection on the faces we show to the world, most of them as much of a fiction as images on a cinema screen – and cue tap-dancing to *Singin' in the Rain*, and a whole other strand about the happy-ever-after escapism of musicals. Witty, affable, wryly philosophical, Faura's solo wears its cleverness with a smile and some of niftiest footwork you could wish for.

The Simplicity of Grasping Air (★★★★) is a meditative oasis which takes its serenity and absorbing beauty from Lindsay John's own presence, and his nuanced Butoh performance. Here, John's slow unfurling of whitened limbs from within a costume of little staves, painted canvas and plumes is at the centre of an exquisite dappling video-work (by Jane McNally) and a similarly evocative soundscape (by Alex Rigg), both of which conjure up the elemental forces of forest, air, wind-shaken leaves and rushing streams. Outside, the Grassmarket is all hub-bub – here, we are drawn in, to another space as much inside our heads as anywhere.

When Iona Kewney promises a *Self-Interrupted Exhibition* (★★★), she's not really giving much away about the mercurial mayhem that she, and guitar-playing Joe Quimby, are

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about to unleash in the bright, airy space of an upstairs studio. While he whangs out litanies of grunting chords and spiralling screeches, Kewney ricochets across the floor like a human ping-pong ball. She ties her tiny body in rubbery knots, holds fierce hand-stands and compresses herself into a card-board box. It's an "expect the unexpected" piece where Kewney's penchant for raw, immediate, seemingly impulsive, action thrills some and alienates others. It's a bit like sticking your fingers into an electric socket: it's a jolt that leaves the brain cells tingling.

Live music, composed and played by Luke Sutherland and Jer Reid, creates not just an accompanying but a sensitively-shaded tone poem for *Found* (★★★★), a dance-theatre piece by Curious Seed that deals in the shifting possibilities of "what if?". With the notion of "You find a letter. It's not yours. Do you read it?" as a beginning, choreographer Christine Devaney spins a mesh of imagined meetings – or lost opportunities – between a Man (Michael Sherin) and a Woman (herself). Video images hint at times and places, or project glimpses of outcomes real or otherwise, while the music adds mystery, merriment, conflict and resignation to danced encounters that – like the spoken text – are not yet as clear in delivery as they could be. It's a pleasingly ambitious project, full of promise with Devaney's own light and lissom dancing a joy to watch.

If you hanker after a double-bill that brings together two different styles – but with each piece not just nicely constructed, but polished – then *Appel/Ring Cycle* (★★★★) is

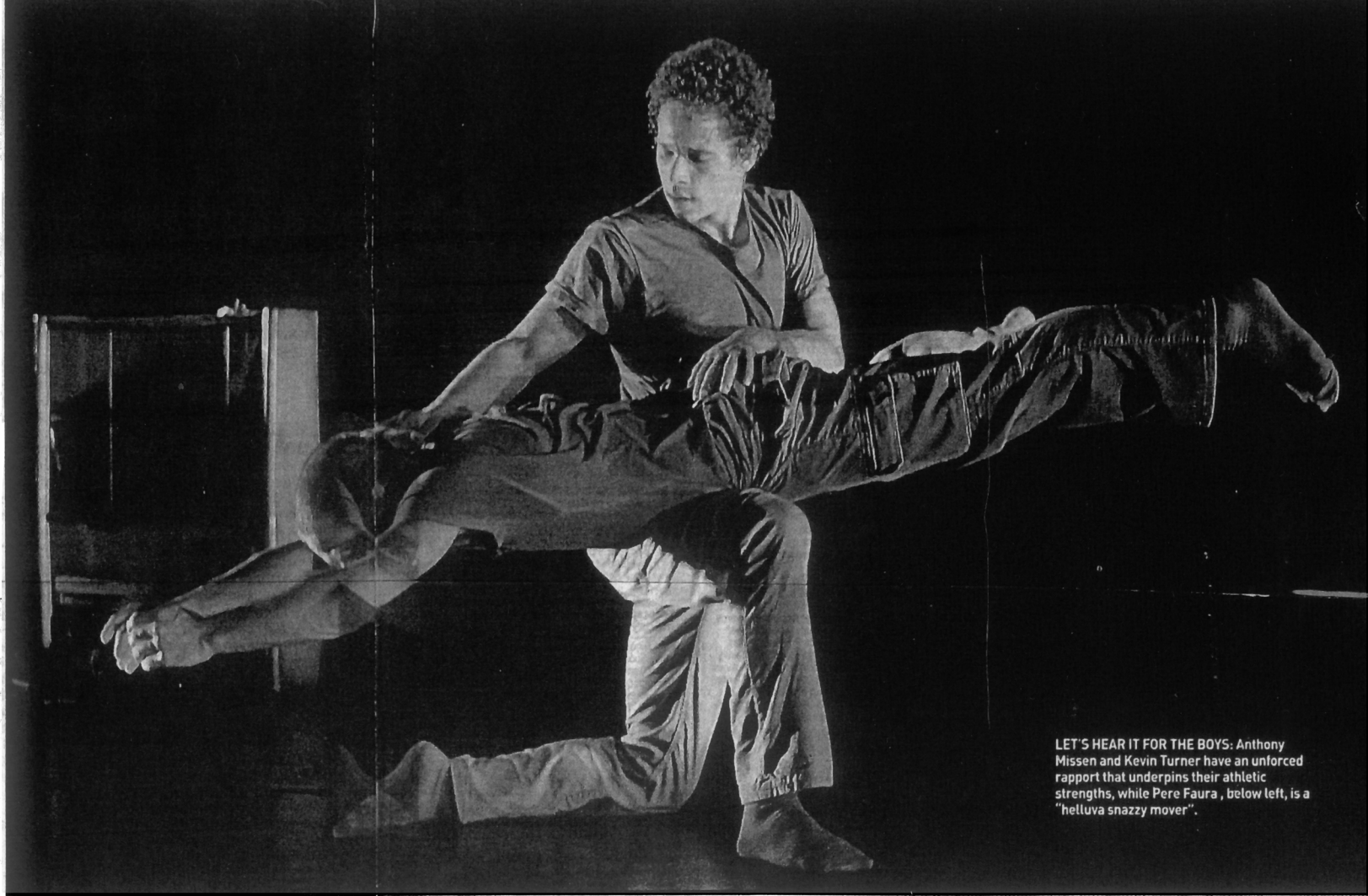
pretty good. In *Ring Cycle*, Shamita Ray's ability to meld the rhythms and gestures of bharatanatyam with elements of contemporary dance allows her to respond, with unfussy precision and elan, to the swoops and shifts of a jazzy, Indian-inflected score. In *Appel*, Company Decalage delight with interchanges of rhythms, textures and power moves: like a series of conversational questions and answers, sinuous sensual stretches – call up hi-speed b-boy prowess while live music is both a commentary and a prompt. Short, but spot on.

The Wayside/Riff (★★★) offers solos by two different artists, Laila Diallo and Matthias Sperling. Hers – *The Wayside* – is an elegantly-danced reverie about departure that catches at the underlying emotional states without ever tipping into histrionics. His – *Riff* – does what it says: samples other work, by Diallo, Forsythe and Shobana Jeyasingh, and, like the names on the LED display, dislocates and reconfigures them into something new. It's academic whether audiences can recognise the different choreographer's styles to begin with: Sperling is a great technician, watchable whatever is afoot.

It's lucky for choreographer Claire Pencak that Tara Hodgson is up for just about anything. In *Dilly Dilly* (★★★★) she's asked to dance, sing, clown, vocalise gobbledegook – and keep the audience of young 'uns (aged 4+) onside as she plays make-believe games in the garden. There are some gorgeous moments in this piece, and Hodgson is simply tremendous – but it's over-stuffed with material, so that despite great visuals, colourful designs and the unstinting Hodgson, it teeters on the brink of us all losing interest.

Dialogue (★★) will possibly interest those who like their dance to have academic leanings. No, make that pretensions. Chums can spend hours noodling and doodling with music and moves – audiences aren't necessarily chums: more action, less phoney-looking experimentation.

As for NYD and their mixed bill, *Something About Others* (★★), these really impressive young dancers have a dire repertoire that can't be disguised by their commitment, energy or ability. Let's hope they get a chance to watch some of the other dance in



LET'S HEAR IT FOR THE BOYS: Anthony Missen and Kevin Turner have an unforced rapport that underpins their athletic strengths, while Pere Faura, below left, is a "helluva snazzy mover".

