

Words and Deeds

I BURN FOR YOU

Conceived, arranged and written by Ian Wilson

At the Capstone Theatre, 28th October 2015

In Hallowe'en week, it seems appropriate to attend a musical drama inspired by Bram Stoker's Dracula. This performance, however, is something out of the ordinary, merging opera, death metal, Asian and traditional woodwind, and mystical projections into a short, somewhat experimental piece.

The initial tension is built by the seated Doctor (Phil Minton) and Woman (Lauren Kinsella), he writing and muttering, she staring into space, occasionally picking up crockery and depositing it with a loud clatter on a miked-up table, her boredom palpable and acting as justification for her involvement with the Vampyr (Attila Csihar). He first appears on the balcony – a bastard Juliet – guttural vocals signalling his day job as black metal vocalist. The Woman is drawn to him despite herself (“Does not your blood sing to me?” he asks her), and he delivers what we presume will be a transformative bite. The Doctor drives him out, cleverly using a ruler and a walking stick to make the shape of the cross. The Woman's wordless sounds indicate that she is changing, and she cries, “What's happening to me?” as the Doctor repeats over and over, “There must be a way”. She begs him to ensure that she does not become a vampire – the means to achieve this request will be bloody, as he observes: “How strange that brute violence should be the instrument for the peace you seek”, a howl of anguish accompanying his agreement, as his tics and whistles increase exponentially, reflecting his mental state. However, redemption does not appear: at the end, the cowboy-booted Vampyr stands on the table, hands on the humans' heads, seemingly triumphant. The house-lights dim and only a smattering of applause is heard at first, as the audience wonder if there is more drama to come – because surely good must overcome evil. There isn't and the applause increases as understanding dawns.

Throughout the performance, the actors have been accompanied by Clive Bell (traditional Asian woodwind instruments and accordion) and Cathal Roche (saxophone), sound artist Lee Patterson (with not so much a bag of tricks as a whole table full of them), and on-screen projections of images and scenes from the natural world (flowers, the sea and a lighthouse, etc.), all perhaps providing further wordless clues to the characters' inner feelings. These images and sounds reflect the idea of a musical language based on the perception of a sound rather than on notated structures, which the mutters and shrieks of the actors themselves also seem to echo. Urgent, unrefined sounds can communicate more meaning to people who may not understand the words of a language. In this way, the piece conveys its meaning. The reduction of the actors' situation to (for the most part) wordless sounds brings deep expressivity; characters suffer in their inner lives, which is reflected in the on-screen projections and the otherworldly tones of the Japanese flute and Lao mouthorgan.

The drama wasn't quite the Dracula experience I'd been expecting, but it provided food for thought – and plenty for the audience to get their teeth into...

Let me turn your deeds into words