

Dancing Partners - The Lowry, Salford

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Choreography: Thomas Noone, Anthony Missen & Kevin Edward Turner

Music: Jim Pinchen, Savath + Savalas, Ryuichi Sakamoto, Gjallarhorn

Reviewer: Peter Jacobs

Dancing Partners is billed as an international triple bill of dance and brings together Barcelona-based (although British born) Thomas Noone Dance Company, Manchester's Company Chameleon and Sweden's Norrdans.

Thomas Noone's *Brutal Love Poems*, for his own company, is a dark and physical exploration of the animal within revealed through the agonising lens of love. Set to interesting and powerfully atmospheric music by British composer Jim Pinchen, which is delivered pleasingly loud and clear, *Brutal Love Poems* examines the pain and sweet agony of physical and emotional connection and disconnection. Intensely performed by four distinctive and beautiful dancers – Javier Arozena, Alba Barral, Jerónimo Forteza and Karolina Szymura – this is a darkly-toned, raw piece of expressive, combative contemporary dance with a gripping feral beauty and impressive technical edge. The effective lighting is kept as sombre as the mood but the music and choreographic shaping slice layers of light and shade through the darkness. As a first point of contact with Noone and his company it's steadily compelling.

Company Chameleon present *Push*, a duet for two men choreographed by the two men who founded the company. *Push* has previously been performed as an open air festival piece, which suits its use of space and minimal staging. Some theatrical lighting and Savath + Savalas and Ryuichi Sakamoto's scratchy contemporary classical soundtrack do it no harm however. Performed by Anthony Missen with Thomasin Gulgec, this incarnation of *Push* has an aching sense of loss and questioning missing from the open air performances, even with the same choreography. *Push* shares an examination of the sensation of touch and physical connection with the previous piece, drawing on Missen and Turner's long friendship and working relationship. Missen's stoic intensity and sense of contained strength is as powerful as ever but Gulgec brings a slightly different energy to his role than Kevin Edward Turner. He has such a sense of quiet vulnerability that it takes *Push* into a deeper – or at least different – realm of connection in the relationship, even when he's balancing his partner aloft. *Push* has always been an exciting exploration of men's testing physical relationships and the push and shove within them but this is a powerful new iteration.

Beautiful Beast by Swedish company Norrdans, also choreographed by Thomas Noone is unexpectedly set on no fewer than eight dancers, with Nordic folk music exquisitely performed live by Gjallarhorn. *Beautiful Beast* is a still-dark but lighter end to the bill. With an unmistakably nocturnal whiff of wood smoke, this piece is more theatrical and narrative in nature, set in an imagined Nordic dream-past of sharing fireside stories and rituals and community. Each folk song sets a new tone for games of combat, social interaction and romance. Noone's choreography carries lingering traces from the first piece – spasmodic twitches, face and head touches, touch and response – also an element of *Push* – one-shoulder seated lifts, dancers standing on prone dancers – but choreographically and narratively this is a more expansive and celebratory piece of dance theatre that completes a satisfying programme on a celebratory note.

Manchester/Salford's love affair with Company Chameleon endures, but it would be good to see Thomas Noone bring his company to the UK for a fully-programmed tour. *Dancing Partners* is an excellent opportunity to catch this creative choreographer's work in the meantime. It is also a valuable opportunity to see range of companies in one sitting.