



Volume 3
FREE

Cloud Gate

Rakhmaninov

Material Evidence

Voice Jam & Videotape

Akio Suzuki

SSO

Hanns Eisler

Needcompany

Flamma Flamma

Australian Art Orchestra

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Wada/Kuhn

Lyrebird

Conspicuous Consumption

Jan Lauwers speaks

This Most Wicked Body

RealTime is a live-in festival writing ensemble creating four editions (one every four days) in print and on-line, responding to shows, exhibitions, forums, festival themes and debates. RealTime on-site was initiated at the 1996 Adelaide Festival and its team of artist-writers invited to LIFT 97 (London International Festival of Theatre). We now return to Adelaide as part of the official program of the 1998 festival.

Festive faultlines

Keith Gallasch

The second wave of the festival has risen and broken, and flung many of us onto strange shores. For me, Jan Lauwers' and Needcompany's *La Pouvoir/Snakesong*, has been, along with Ballets C. de la B.'s *La Tristeza Complice*, one of the festival's most disturbingly satisfying experiences. *La Pouvoir* is a play-but-not-a-play that shifts the theatrical ground beneath its audience's feet. Cloud Gate's *Songs of the Wanderers* is another such experience. Many were astonished at their involvement in something so still, so explosive and, after the convention of the curtain call, so meditative. Tears ran down my cheeks. Two friends felt tears run down their left cheeks only ("Was it something in the rice?"). The audience coughing and the call of mobile phones dispersed into an empathetic silence in the Saturday afternoon performance.

But I was also alarmed. The festival bonus of sustained dialogue and debate has its downside when you encounter someone immediately after a performance (or in the

third or fourth interval of *The Seven Streams*) who hates the work you like, and you're in no shape to defend it. A director I respect announced *Songs* melodramatic, over-acted, lacking the control of a company like, say, Sankai Juku. A friend concurs later, admiring the overall theatricality of the work (the journey, the light, the rice), but not the dancing, again sensing it acted rather than driven by some other state. (See responses from Virginia Baxter, Richard Murphet and Maryanne Lynch in this volume.) From where I sat, and it is a work that benefits from height and distance, I didn't sense any of this, the faces mask-like (as any in Kabuki or Butoh), the gestures and movement elemental. Taste, knowledge, insights divide audiences on many fault lines. Debate persists over *The Seven Streams of the River Ota*, two former festival directors offering totally opposing views. For many, the work induces excited monologues or the throwaway critical standbys—"superficial", "soap opera", "doesn't go anywhere". Even some defenders have been critical of *Seven Streams'* account of Japanese culture—the poor version of Japanese English, dressing the kimono the wrong way, the mask that is not a Noh mask, the curious rendering of the Japanese personality.

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Less publicly voiced, but deeply felt are arguments over *Va Yomer. Va Yelech*. Is this company virtuosic? Carefully choreographed yes, but without demand or challenge. Occasionally vocally rich, but barely approaching the power of the un-miked Chorus Repertory Theatre in *Uttarpriyadarshi* in the Amphitheatre. Nonetheless, I was engrossed from time to time in *Va Yomer*, greedy for its rare moments of irony (Adam and Eve hurling God's and Satan's words at each other) and critique (three authority figures leaning over each other to take the microphone as they relish the delivery of prohibitions both potent and inane). God's land-grabbing injunctions, however gross, however bloody, are performed without irony. Debate has even reached the pages of *The Advertiser* (March 7), the arts editor countering a critic's crudely dismissive review (March 2) of Nikki Heywood's *Burn Sonata*. Jan Lauwers was astonished at the size of the audience for the festival forums. Adelaide has an audience greedy for ideas and this festival is feeding them—including talk sessions on food and art (get your tickets for Gay Bilson's *Loaves and Fishes* now).

Leah Purcell's *Box the Pony* has successfully played to enthusiastic audiences hungry for insights into Indigenous life. *Uttarpriyadarshi* has given us a rare taste of Indian theatre, performed with great story telling prowess and image-making and well outside our preconceptions of things Indian. Artists' week is about to commence and ANAT's *FOLDBACK* was held just as we went to print. A large and curious audience at Ngpartji Multimedia Centre celebrated the Adelaide-based Australian Network of Art and Technology's considerable contribution to new media arts anticipating the greater role these will play in festivals to come. Now for the final great festival wave: Heiner Goebbels, Nigel Kellaway, Wendy Houston, Meryl Tankard, the Zender-Schubert *Wintereise*, Teshigawara, Giorgio Batistelli, *Music is Our Culture* (with Indigenous composers) and the Balanescu and Brodsky String Quartets.

To enter and exit

Richard Murphet

Festival Forum, *Design*; Cloud Gate Dance Company, *Songs of the Wanderers*; Needcompany, *Le Pouvoir/Snakesong*.

Faced, as Jan Lauwers put it in the Festival Forum on design, with the empty screen of the computer, dreaming a starting

point, how to enter, how to begin testifying to the disturbance and disruption being caused within me and within the company I keep (strong disagreements abound), faced not simply by any one show but by the sheer monstrous Animal of the Festival itself. Knowing that the moment I enter that first word on the screen I will have made my entrance like a performer onto an empty stage. That breathtaking feeling of actually having to begin the irreversible momentum of the show. Wang Rong-yu, waiting for the rice to begin its unstoppable flow as the eternal wanderers emerge and the red drapes rise. Leda, with the uneasy music enveloping us in the dark, poised to fuck herself with her puppet Zeus, thus beginning the unending human saga of the interplay between eros and death. The American soldier, camera in hand, stepping on to the gravel path outside the Japanese house, about to face the horrors of Hiroshima and with one ejaculation to fertilise a 50 year comic-tragedy of East-West relations. Iyar Wolpe, on the brink of the white cloth stage (screen? page?) of the Bible, opening with those words which are at a soul-point of her race and which seem to speak for so many of the (Judeo-Christian) shows I have seen so far: "My heart is sore pained within me..." It's there in the names: *Burn Sonata*, *La Tristeza Complice*, *Snakesong*, *The Wasteland*, *Possessed*. I appreciated the direct concern in Naomi's question to Lauwers in the Forum: "Why is your show so painful?" And equally I understood his response (to paraphrase and shorten): "Because the world is a painful place".

Never was this pain so vivid than when (by chance scheduling) I went, with the wanderers' song still filling me, to hear the snake's lament on the destructiveness of power mixed with erotic desire. The very belief system that *The Song of the Wanderers*, with its final unifying spiral, represented was rent asunder and its loss painfully evident in the disintegrated world of *Snakesong*. But the need for an aesthetics with which to express this rent and this loss gives rise in the work of both Belgian companies seen here this year to a charged and intense theatricality. It is one which, to use the words of Rudi Laermans in describing Meg Stuart, an artist we saw in the 96 Festival, "inhabits the realm of the uncanny" and is thereby sacred in its own perversely relevant way.

The harmonic completeness of the Taiwanese work, its organic rhythm, with scarcely a step or a move or a shift of tone

out of place, the sheer lavish, joyous power of the rice-saturated spectacle, the layers of image and sound are all woven into an impressive, comforting, impermeable texture. It is not a cultural purity that creates the strength and impermeability. The touches of Western modernist expressive dance mixed in with the Eastern ritual journey and the sound track of Georgian folk songs are oddly disjunctive elements. But the artistic force and accomplishment of the work seemed to me to be one of synthesis. Lin Hwai-min's previous work *Nine Songs* is described in the Souvenir Guide as containing "disruptive moment(s)...when the audience is forced to experience a critical estrangement". I felt no such estrangement in *Songs of the Wanderers*, from my position in the dress circle watching the map of the journey written into the rice. Here was an example of what Rudi Laermans, in talking from a different angle about the very different work of Meg Stuart, calls an "essential" (stage) image: "these images are so much 'image' that they never transform into words...(they) do not affect because of their 'meaning' or content, but by their 'being-an-image'". And later: "An image cannot be reduced to the metaphorical addition of a number of qualified poses, movements, or gestures. An image always keeps these elements together, and synthesises them into a particular ... image".

The power of a work like *Songs of the Wanderers* is at times overwhelming, undeniable. But it is for me at one with its limitations. I see it, I hear it, I feel it, I am in awe of it but it remains outside me, choreographed to the point of completion. How do I get in there? Despite Lin's professed interculturality, this was also a question of cultural difference, of course. *Wanderers* is at the sacred end of the spectrum. It contains none of the profane late twentieth century savvy I witnessed (and recognised) in the Taiwanese work on show at LIFT in London last year. The limitation is not in the work so much as in me—a profane Western voyeur both seduced by and resisting the seduction of Orientalism. I was enormously grateful for the final meditation upon the spiral as time to allow the spell of the work to move through my veins before I re-entered the Adelaide sun to let it sweat out.

Needcompany's *Snakesong/Le Pouvoir* demolished all the tenets of artistic form and sensibility upon which *Wanderers* was based,

putting a grenade under the belief in art as a force of synthesis. *Snakesong* had holes in it open enough to breathe through and deep enough to suicide in. In traditional terms it was undramatic, a-theatrical, inconsistently performed (the acting/performing dualism raised by Keith Gallasch in one of the Festival Forums was here the bloody knife edge upon which the very nature of identity rested), scenographically 'ugly', with scant respect for its audience, too loud, too laid back and unresolved thematically. And yet for all this it was liberating, witty, intriguing, confronting, irritating, satisfying, disturbing and with complete respect for its audience's future.

The image seed from which it evidently grew was that fragment of the Lascaux cave paintings in which a man with a bird's head and an erect penis lies prone next to the dead body of a bison. What a starting point! There at the birth of Western art is the eroticism of death, the fatality of sex, the paradoxes which have haunted it ever since. Following the opening darkness, the tortuous music and the twisted images of classical myth, the shocking interrogation scene drives hard into these paradoxes with unflaggingly overt histrionics. Did Leda die in sex (the little death) or was her death violent and meaningless. "Did you die (come) together?" The debate powers on and on through double translation. It really matters to them, these investigators, these actors, it is an issue to engage with fully, one important enough to keep chasing through the pain and the boredom, even though they know it is insoluble. It is rare these days to see such raw commitment to an argument on stage. The issue is still crucial enough to make demands on our passions. The myth is still with us, insoluble. We still suffer from it, as the gathering in the contemporary Antwerp scene makes all too clear. The competing egos, the lack of focus, the ache of betrayal, the lack of motive or certain cause, the inability of the characters to work from the heart when the actions needed are so simple and so necessary. The men and the young women are affectless, disengaged, able only to relate through violence and denial. The 'room', with its plinths and microphones and objects of a civilisation's failed history is an empty mix of classical ruins and postmodern kitsch. This is a wasteland of the Millennium. It is little wonder that the extraordinary central woman, whose determination, courage, indomitability and dry dismissive wit is the only whiff of hope in the entire play, 'dies'

out of it, orders the others off and leaves the mess for us to deal with. Her final wry smile at us is horrifying in its implication.

Needcompany—even the name is a cry for help. 'Help me! I'm Belgian!' as the actress in *La Tristezza* yelled out. 'Belgian' in this late twentieth century has, through the power of its theatre companies, come to mean 'human'.

Leda...she said

Linda Marie Walker
Snakesong/Le Pouvoir
Needcompany
Playhouse, March 4

There are three parts to *Le Pouvoir* (the second of Jan Lauwer's *Snakesong Trilogy*), literally: beginning, middle, end. In the Beginning total black-out; one is with the music, it's like being inside it, or it's inside one/you (ambushed by it), it prepares you somewhat for an inescapable fact—nothing will come of 'this', this insideness is without release. Slowly an image appears on the stage: Leda with the swan. This is the sexual moment from which all else comes, which implicates everyone, and which was inevitable. Then, an interrogation, the Middle. Here language is an economy. Over and over the story is told: did you get pleasure (yes), did you love him (no) (yes), did you want him (yes) (no), did you kill him (no). The Queen, her Adviser, Leda, her Translator, the Swan, his Translator. Translation (love/violence; language penetrating language) seems the issue here, the 'thing' that creates the gap, the space. An opening, a void, a wound (the malicious constant opening of it), there, and remaining there in all its messy infected rawness, unhealable, and equivalent to a scream. It drives them all mad, they can't keep their sticky-noses out of it. There is no knowing 'what happened'. The Queen wants another drink. Each time Leda tells the story it's a 'version'. Or, so it seems; for every incident (and the more disastrous the better) there are many passages or speaking-parts; no development, much illusion.

Nothing happens other than what is (being) seen; does this make sense? Well, yes, sort of. 'It' all breaks into fragments, and we see/hear them—the investigation of the archive goes on. The interrogation is done on behalf of the archive, feverishly. As if it's important to know, whatever. The Queen gets her fix, and splinters—and this, the place where she finds herself, is a finer

place, it's where she prefers to be. It's too exhausting (for her), this struggle for the 'real'. And then the End, and the end is now, in our time: the family. The queen/mother/wife still wants a drink. She's very still, waiting, unmoved, one wonders if there was ever a time when she wasn't waiting. Leda tells the story again, no-one much cares about this erotic encounter, it's ordinary. But then as soon as the erotic enters the actual-domestic, as soon as there is betrayal, then there's grief, sobbing. And someone is pregnant, and the men want to see her tits. And the queen, being so bored—and no-one will give her a drink (again), after all she should be able to handle this, this yelling, this piling up of language "...as if language is always falling short, as if language is taking revenge on the story ..." (Erwin Jans, *Souvenir Guide*)—dies. She yells too, "Do you want to see my tits, Adelaide?", and the audience responds: "Yes". So this wonderful middle-aged actress, Viviane De Muynck, takes off her clothes. And then she dies. Standing before the microphone. Dead. The others, the 'family', wonder if they should lay her down. They decide, finally, she looks ridiculous, standing up. She says, "no". She's dead, that's all.

The Beginning, Middle, and End could be in any order, they are each in the middle (and in the middle of the middle) of themselves anyway. It's this perpetual middle that is staged. It's this middle-madness which has an appearance, structurally, of order—of classifying. Everyone is quite clear about their role, what they are called, how they are related to one another. The challenge is set up at the start with the visual loss of the body in the blackness, and the becoming-music of it. This indicates a loss that is no loss at all. It's only loss when it's brought to reason; it's reason that is dangerous, that frightens us to the death that the queen 'does', the death that stares with open eyes, exposing 'us', human shapes. Interpretation will not alter the performance, it only requests our presence in the 'court', as witnesses who will leave, silenced; who will retire for a while uneasy. This unease felt like 'doubt' to me, but doubt I was doubtful about, doubt about stories, and especially about the story I'd been told (and now tell). And this is exactly what I didn't want to write here, as it makes sense too readily (see: *The Madness Of The Day* by Maurice Blanchot). A sense that defers to the madness (disguised as custom) of a certain 'looking-on', 'observing',

'clarifying'. What love is this? The loss, I mean the 'loss' one is watching, is love. Not romantic love, but love. The body mourns the loss of a love which it reckons (in terms of reckoning) belongs to it, reckons it shouldn't relinquish, and especially shouldn't translate.

There's another type of performance/translation: writing (the act of one who writes). Not language, but the writing. It responds, it constellates as marks, material, on the page, but it acts, it figures a particular landscape or tension, it makes something else again, the story begins once more: Leda, she said ... "Perhaps it's a question of reconciling the many different versions of the same story. There is a phrase that I am fond of writing. I appropriated it from a letter written by another writer. *But the texts belong to you.* I accepted this gift. I took it to heart. But it is not enough simply to remain a reader." (Brenda Ludeman, Visual Arts Program)

Jan Lauwers speaking

Keith Gallasch

Snakesong/Le Pouvoir
Needcompany
Playhouse, March 5

If the audience experience of *Le Pouvoir*, the second part of Needcompany's *Snakesong Trilogy*, is profoundly (and beautifully) unsettling, writer-director-designer Jan Lauwers and his ensemble are also feeling delirium—of severe jetlag, of reviving a show not performed for some eighteen months and coming just when they are reassembling the trilogy as a single performance with a group of eleven musicians, not to mention continuing development of another work premiered at the major visual arts exhibition *documentaX* in Kassel, Germany in September 1997. "But it's okay", says Lauwers, whose intense gaze and spare delivery can be interrupted by bright-eyed laughter and brief floods of enthusiasm. The man is like his work. The ground constantly shifts in *Le Pouvoir*. An opening blackout is epic. The first complete image is a lie, of a kind. The next is sculptural rather than simply theatrical. The next has the audience more brightly illuminated than the performers. What commenced as an elliptical performance work, intensely visual and aural, a nightmare—a primal peering into the dark at half shapes, a dim purgatory—the senses both denied and overfed, is now a play.

But what a play. Language is filtered

through successive translations (as part of the drama) as the Queen and her adviser, the Professor, interrogate Leda and Zeus. There is no set to earth us—design is generated by the actors' mapping out of space, by the sparest of lighting, by the stark differentiation in costume. Language is as uncertain as the Queen's diminishing authority. The words 'dead', 'death', 'die' fly about as we grasp at them—how is it that Leda and Zeus are dead if they are before us, their deaths described so vividly ... and sexually? It's not surprising then that Lauwers has directed Needcompany in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, where dying is orgasm, that little death, and very real death; nor that Lauwers draws on George Bataille; that he is intrigued by voyeurism—the position he implicates us in so deeply in the performance's blacked-out opening and faint emerging images. A man and a woman appear to be engaging in a gross sexual act—but what exactly are they doing? Then there's enough light to see that she's vigorously miming sex with what looks like a ventriloquist's dummy which she tosses away as she exits. This sex is illusion. But then we are faced with a very real Zeus. But then again, he's a god, a myth...he and Leda ruthlessly interrogated by mortals greedy for the gross facts—was the coupling rape, mutual pleasure, was there death, what kind, what size is his organ, who came and when? The second act of the play leaves mythic time and enters the domestic present, the Queen now a mother with an addiction, suicidal, denied emotion, like the Queen, by the Professor-husband. However, the banality of this present is increasingly saturated with words and images bleeding in from the first act—blood appearing literally as characters dip their fingers into a bowl of stage blood and express alarm at the sight of it, cuts, vaginal bleeding ... In the second act stylish plinths are dressed with toaster, coffee-maker, flowers, objets d'art and a dead white swan. Everyone is standing, but they speak as if they are sitting down. The mother dies still standing, but still speaks. No one refers to the on-stage swan. But one of the women tells of running over a swan in her van and then backing over it. The tale is told through wild almost hysterical laughter with the audience drawn in, giggly and then raucous, implicated—on the night I saw *La Pouvoir*. Lauwers is pleased with the response and, at the forum on design (March 6, recorded by 5UV), thanked festival audiences for their good-humoured response for what he admits to be one of his darkest works. He explains to a worried

young audience member at the forum that *La Pouvoir* was written at the time of the Bosnian war ("only ten hours away by road"), of political corruption and appalling crimes against children in Belgium. The Belgians didn't like the work. In Munich it was met with silence, until he added at the end a knowing smile offered the audience by the Queen/mother. *Snakesong* has been a success, its capacity to unsettle relished by its international audience.

Lauwers says to me later that his new two-play work (premiered in part at *Documenta*) is a touch more positive, more hopeful, treasuring what we lose when someone is no longer with us. Based on Camus' *Caligula*, it has been created for part one to be performed in an art gallery, part two in a theatre. He smiles: "We need cities that have both a very good gallery and a very good theatre". A key moment in Camus' play is Caligula's dance for which he demands the judgement of others. In the Lauwers version a dancer is added to perform for Caligula, judgement still being the issue, the dancing unfolding for seven minutes in a very small space. This challenge is set for a leading dancer and composer in each city that Needcompany visits. "There will be no set, no lighting, no costumes, just a table and chairs and a square metre space for the dancer." "Do you select the gallery room?" "Yes." "Do you mind what paintings or other works are in it?" "No." "Just a bit?" He laughs. "A bit." Like Alain Platel from Les Ballets C. de la B., Lauwers has the facility to disappear himself from apparent acts of choice and power while otherwise displaying enormous authority and vision.

Working the *Snakesong Trilogy* into a single performance has proved no easy task. "I don't want it to be a six hour play. No play should be six hours." So he must edit and he must reframe the whole. "*Snakesong* is about the Professor, played by Mil Seghers, even though I wrote *Le Pouvoir* about the Queen for Viviane De Muynck. He will sit in a wheelchair throughout the performance—" "Even in the interrogation scene?" "Yes—with one hand shaking uncontrollably, all the time". He says this with relish. Because the music in this complete version of the trilogy will be live and onstage, the opening blackout of *Le Pouvoir* is out: "There is the music", he declares, as if to say that Rombout Willems powerful score is more than enough for Lauwers' dark purpose.

"Why the Professor?" (A program essay by Jurgen Pieters, well worth reading, "suspect[s] that the professor has more than a few traits in common with the artist Lauwers"; see also Erwin Jans' essay in the Souvenir Guide). "Mil Seghers, who plays the Professor, is a great actor. Though he is not an actor. He came to work with me at 46 years of age after his business failed. He looks like a professor. I think that's where it starts."

Not quite heaven

Diana Weekes

Turnage, Gubaidulina, Messiaen

Sydney Symphony Orchestra

Festival Theatre, March 4

Over the last few years, the seats in the Festival Theatre stalls have been sagging at an alarming rate. Once you're seated, that's it. Down, down, down, so we raise our hopes to compensate. When the action began on Wednesday night, first impressions were that the venue was unsuitable, and that perhaps the SSO was sagging too. However, these factors soon faded in the glare of the works themselves, which greedily absorbed our attention. Good programming reaps its own rewards.

First on this classical contemporary menu was *Three Screaming Popes* (1989) by Mark-Anthony Turnage, written when he was 28 and inspired by an exhibition of Francis Bacon's paintings at the Tate Gallery. In his own words "exuberant and brash", it proved to be a psychedelic appetiser, full of ideas and laden with energy. A bit thin on formal development of the audible, not cerebral variety, it nonetheless reveals a mastery of orchestration and a prodigious grasp of symphonic dimensions. It discloses a wide frame of reference (*Jaws* and *Psycho* glimpsed between the lines) and even admits a dry sense of humour, predictably more noticeable towards the end. A preference for grubby textures and flatness of intonation is applied with such subtle consistency as to suggest quite a distinctive, personal style—a rarity these days. It deserved more respect than it received during this performance, especially from the strings.

Such was not the case with Sofia Gubaidulina's violin concerto *Offertorium* (1980). The highlight of the program, it stood tall enough as a work to be almost flattered by the dismal acoustic (aural equivalent of lighting?). Soloist Michael Dauth (the epitome of composure in his

stylish Nehru jacket) is a consummate musician, and that proved to be highly infectious. The strings found freedom to ad lib glissandos and slap their fingerboards so that their input became at once technically less demanding and musically more challenging. Textures were created and manipulated by individual aural intelligence rather than by the harsh realities of more conventional notation. Within this framework of communal improvisation sounds were adapted to the surroundings rather than the other way around. And it worked. The dialogue between soloist and orchestra levelled of its own accord and one began to sense that what goes up must come down. Formally the work is based on the dissection and reconstruction of the main theme from Bach's *Musical Offering* (actually a hand-me-down from King Frederick the Great of Prussia). The compositional process was handled with such artistry that what went up as fireworks came down in showers of tinkling light which were literally suspended in mid-air, a sparkling filigree of sounds nervously projected against the latent background of total silence.

A not-so-subtle change of program saw the inclusion of Giovanni Gabrieli's *Canzona Noni Toni* (for 8 Voices) instead of *Canzona X* as originally advertised. However, on this occasion, the Festival Theatre was no substitute for St Mark's Cathedral, Venice. In an ideal venue, the work might well have provided eloquent foreplay to the religious ecstasy of Messiaen's *Et exspecto resurrectionem mortuorum* which followed. But under these circumstances, with four players banished to either side of the huge stage and Edo de Waart stranded and superfluous in the middle, it was oddly out of place. Outmoded, too, is the idea that modern trumpets and trombones, with their vast range of dynamics and velvety smooth, liquid legato, could ever compete with the distinctive colours or definitive clarity of sackbuts and cornettos. "Ravish and stupified" this performance certainly did not.

Messiaen's *Et exspecto* was inspired by "the stepped ziggurats of Mexico, the pyramids of Egypt, the great Gothic spaces of Europe", and given its first performances in "the magnificent vaulted spaces of Sainte Chapelle in Paris and Chartres Cathedral". Scored for woodwind, brass and percussion, it is strident, discordant and angular, programmatic yet puzzling, colourful yet complex, challenging for performers and audience alike. The players are seated in long

straight lines (precluding performer interaction) and are thus totally dependent on the conductor for their aggregate precision of timing and timbre. Each section of the work is preceded by selected texts, and it opens with a theme for the bass brass: "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O lord. Lord hear my voice". In this performance the bass continued to dominate well past the point where, from the depths, there arises a "chorale of awesome majesty". In short, the balance was frequently lopsided, the textures muddy, and the performance laboured. Even allowing for the degree of difficulty and the infinite variety of voicings which may be coaxied from such an ensemble, it seemed under-rehearsed by today's high standards. There was no spark, no sovereignty, no sense of "unconscious competence".

These days we must face the fact that, with or without specialist knowledge, and with or without any formal training in music, the average concert-goer is far more discerning than s/he once was. I have a wicked and recurring dream that if we entered all of our state orchestras into some great big international competition (logistics don't feature in dreams) none of them would pass the first round, whereas if we picked a Test Team, it might win first prize. Contemporary music, of course, would be compulsory. For all the hype and high profile, the selectors might need to look further afield than the present SSO. But it's only a dream.

Cross-play

Gail Priest

Into the Fire

Australian Art Orchestra

Sruthi Laya Ensemble

Elder Hall, March 5

Cacophony is a wondrously liberating sound. It brings out the naughty child in me. I want to get the pots and pans out of the cupboard and join in the throng. And I suspect the 'serious' musicians of the Australian Art Orchestra feel a bit like naughty children too. This naughtiness, cheekiness perhaps, exudes from them as they casually enter the performance space, chatting and laughing. The performance of music, as presented here, appears to be a head space that can easily be switched on and off. An alien concept to one steeped in the heavy pre-show preparation of Western 'acting'. But here they are, they're ready, I'm ready, here we go.

The four pieces presented in *Into The Fire* were works composed for the Australian Art Orchestra, led by Paul Grabowsky, and the Sruthi Laya Ensemble—four musicians from Madras playing in the South Indian Karnatic tradition. The first piece, *The Ferryman*, was composed by Niko Schauble, percussionist with the AAO. Beginning with ambient sounds like the scouring of a garbage bin, the piece gradually develops into a rhythm section, led by the Sruthi Laya Ensemble using the *mridangam*—"the King of the percussion instruments of south India" so the program tells me; the *kanjira*—a kind of tambourine-like instrument made with the skin of a monitor lizard; a *ghatam*—a clay pot shaped instrument creating a metallic sound when struck with the fingers; and the *morsing*—a steel blade held in the mouth played like a jaw-harp. The piece traverses vast ground, from the minimalism of a saxophone and didgeridoo circular breathing contest that grows out of the hubbub of the assorted conversations of the musicians, to the sweet tinkering and arrested moments of Grabowsky on the piano, to the wild and 'frabjous caloo callay' of the whole orchestra strutting their stuff all at once.

The second piece was the show stopper—the premiere performance of *Moras*, composed for the orchestra by John Rodger, with music for the Sruthi Laya Ensemble composed by Karaikudi R Mani. Beginning like a zephyr with an exquisite solo on the wooden flute, this solo is overlapped and overtaken by a mesmeric piece on a reed instrument of some form. (It is at this time that I begin to think like my mother and wish that they would pay a little heed to theatricality and move the music stands so I can see their faces and identify the instrument being played. The sounds are so magical the instrument could almost be anything.) This melds into a rhythm section led by the Sruthi Laya Ensemble and I begin to notice a strange phenomenon. Certain members of the orchestra are making delicate, discreet hand gestures—little flicks of the fingers, a pulsing folding of the hands, a movement signalling one musician who then signals to another—gentle butterflies floating on the sound. Grabowsky is swaying at the front of the stage but I'm not sure who is conducting any more. These rhythmic sections are ruptured by full orchestral moments. I feel as if the orchestra is trying to play their woodwind instruments like percussion. It makes for an exhilarating conclusion.

Just as I was beginning to question the intention of this collaboration—do they want to blend the musical forms? to expand their own dimensions through the new and strange? is it the world music novelty factor?—Paul Grabowsky addresses my concerns. He states that it is not a matter of getting the two disparate forms and throwing them up against a wall to see how they stick, more a process of trying to capture the spirit of the Indian music and expressing it through the Art Orchestra's particular musical form. I buy that.

After interval, Scott Tinkler's *Stitching Leonardo* had a smooth bluesy feel overlaid with brutal and blatant chaos. Listeners were rewarded if they could attain a state of duality, of both the ears and mind. This was followed by *Vasanth Pravaaham*, composed by Karaikudi R Mani and arranged by Adrian Sherriff, which was the starting point for the collaboration between the AAO and the SLE. Alternating between the Indian percussion and a kind of big band emulation of the sound, this piece was, surprisingly, the most user-friendly and 'melodic' in the Western sense. Topped off by a beautiful solo by Sandy Evans (oh my god, a woman!) exhibiting astounding dynamic range and virtuosity.

I keep having memories of *Romper Room*, of marching around my lounge room as a child of four with a colander on my head banging away on a saucepan with a wooden spoon, making enough clatter to bring on Armageddon. Now while I am in no way implying that this was the level of skill employed by the Art Orchestra and its collaboration with the Sruthi Laya Ensemble, I do believe that the glorious noise created by the struggle and compromise of these two forms produced a similar euphoric and liberating effect on this naughty little child.

Eisler, too briefly

Keith Gallasch

Die Massnahme

Hanns Eisler,

Adelaide Town Hall, March 7

For one glorious performance, a sound from heaven, a left wing heaven, a great musical archival moment and much more, because we are hearing music rarely heard (especially in Australia) and a major work that has yet to enjoy its time. *Die Massnahme* worries at the power of the Party, not god ("God is a fascist" the chorus

declares in another work in the concert), to take life. Robert Zeigler's conducting is appropriately expert, taut and driving, Tim Maddock's direction spare and epic (big screen projections of the text—sung pretty clearly in English—rather than pokey surtitles), the acting clear, direct, restrained (echoing party agitprop performance and Soviet realist posturing), all adding up to a surprisingly emotional experience, much of the power emanating from the remarkable music, brass and voices magically melding or one springing out of the other. Eisler's music is resolutely accessible but transcends the ordinary, is symphonic in effect though scored essentially for woodwind, brass and percussion and linked to the everyday in its brass band, church choir resonances. Brecht barred *Die Massnahme* from performance in the early 50s for fear of its misuse in Cold War American propaganda, a tragic act of denial for Eisler's reputation. This concert was a festival highlight, a demand for Eisler to be heard, its execution perfect. I was reminded of an other remarkable woodwind, brass and percussion performance, the SSO's not-quite-perfect account of Messiaen's *Et Exspecto ...* Ziegler and the Adelaide Chamber Orchestra (and the Adelaide Chamber Singers) excelled. This was gloriously and sadly and most likely a once in a lifetime experience.

Enough light and shade

Ewart Shaw

Rakhaminov, *Vespers*

The Berlin Radio Choir

St Francis Xavier Cathedral, March 6

According to *Shine* the 'Rakh 3' drives men mad, then the 'Rakh V' must help repair the damage. If you want to be pedantic these aren't vespers, as such, but music for an all night vigil, composed of fifteen movements for unaccompanied choir, moments of intense meditation broken by joyful climaxes.

Fifty seven members of the Berlin Radio Choir gave their only Australian concert in St Francis Xavier under the direction of Robin Gritton, who kept a clear sense of the musical architecture throughout. Talking architecture, SFX is shorter along the nave than St Peter's Cathedral, with less reverberation, and is much more suited to this type of music. I was seated at the back of the Cathedral, so for me the first part of the service was accompanied by early evening traffic along Wakefield Street, but the outer noises faded except for the

perfectly timed bells for eight o'clock just before the final movement.

The Orthodox ban on musical instruments in church gave Russian composers a great opportunity to explore the timbres and ranges of the singing voice, and in the Rakhmaninov, the basses go down to a bottom B-flat, which isn't just low, it's very low. The Russian words sung with exceptionally fine diction, are an unusual sound for Adelaide audiences, and Rakhmaninov's blending of Orthodox chant, and modern polyphonic devices kept the audience/congregation attentive throughout.

As the day faded through the amber and stained glass windows of the cathedral, the music became lighter in texture and more flexible in rhythm, as if to keep the singers alert through the twelve hour service imitated and condensed here. Movement 11, the Magnificat with the Orthodox trope "Raised higher than the cherubim etc", was the core of the work, but it was followed by imaginative splendour to the end, when the choir's final notes faded into the evening. There are brief but highly important solo roles in the work, and the mezzo soprano Tatjana Sotin had the gorgeous Slavic darkness of tone called for by the work. The tenor Thomas Kolber in his high exposed lines showed tension, and a slight edge to the voice, but projected cleanly across the choir.

A friend of mine suggested that more variation in the use of the lights in the cathedral would have aided the dramatic impact of the performance. Maybe so, but the light and shade in the music were enough for me. I even managed to forget how penitentially hard the seats are.

As I left, Robyn Archer was being congratulated by members of the audience for choosing something that so beautifully expressed the theme of the sacred that runs through the festival.

Hurry Up Please, It's Time

Diana Weekes

Rundfunkchor Berlin, Rakhmaninov *Vespers*; Cloud Gate Dance Theatre, *Songs of the Wanderers*; Red Shed Theatre Company, *The Architect's Walk*

The urgency, ambivalence and declamatory ardour of Fiona Shaw's *The*

Waste Land seem to sum up mid-festival fever for me. Word of mouth can hardly catch up with what is happening, has happened. With potential audiences still jostling for tickets, when push comes to shove you couldn't get a more romantic offer than the Rakhmaninov *Vespers* Op. 37, *All-Night Vigil* performed by the Berlin Radio Chorus in St Francis Xavier Cathedral. Inside the church it was clearly too oppressive for the choir to be comfortable (one member disappeared miraculously a few times before making a solitary exit) but the audience managed an opening round of applause which harboured the expectations of blue chip investment. Hats off to conductor Robin Gritton, who fronted this mixed gathering and patiently extracted musical magic, heaven on a stick (except there was none). The angelic hosts themselves could hardly have been more harmonious, the modal melancholy more mellifluous, the balance more consistently benign. The ON AIR adrenaline was pumping, the sound equal to more than the sum of its parts. It was minutely disconcerting, after the event, to imagine that we might have had the really raw, robust and Russian Rakhmaninov poured through a sieve that was just a little too fine for the occasion.

At the other end of the spectrum, the songs which accompanied the Taiwanese wanderers on their spiritual journey were already pre-recorded. Finely filtered and masterfully mindful of Westerners' need for simple rhythms, the music itself was often constructed from (to our ears) exotic scales which in turn were made up of microtones, so we had near but not quite perfect fourths and fifths, unanimous but not quite unison octaves. The soundtrack (incorporating the "soulful and Islamic-influenced folk songs of Georgia") was stunning, neither slave to the image nor master of the action; just an equal and totally supportive partner in the overall design. Which, incidentally, was so inspired and inspiring that the sound of the rice itself will be retained as a sensual experience. Total silence can only equate to total stillness, and the dance of life itself is synonymous with the harmony of the spheres. Amazing.

And as if that wasn't enough in twenty four hours, festival frenzy urged me to do *The Architect's Walk* in the evening. In this production, Michael Smetanin's score is a godsend. In-your-face from the beginning, it strengthens, splinters and solidifies the central, moral dilemma in a way which no

amount of direction could ever achieve with the spoken word, especially not here. Parts of it sounded as if someone had been on standby to record Phillip Glass improvising electronically on the Widor *Toccata*, but it fitted the bill exactly. Alison Farr gave an impressive account of the Paul Celan *Songs*, and John Menhennett (percussion) and Ron Pearce (piano accordion) were well cast as part of the musical action. And that, after all, is what counts. It's time musicians realised: 'grave music' has had its day.

In the folds of thought

Linda Marie Walker

Who's Afraid Of Anything?
Junko Wada/Hans Peter Kuhn
Space Theatre, March 5

I sat next to Richard Margetson at *The Waste Land*, and sat next to him at Junko Wada's performance, both by chance; as he stood up to leave *Who's Afraid Of Anything?* he said, "I thought there would have been at least one car chase"; in the foyer someone else said, with a deep shrug, "Tell me, where was the concept", I didn't know, I hadn't looked for one; I turned around and there was Keith Gallasch moving in slow motion and making strange shapes with his hands (he called them "autistic") and saying to no-one in particular, "Well, that was a change of pace", and it was; a few people nodded off; I closed my eyes twice and felt the weight of sleep, and in that state realised that I was sliding 'elsewhere', being sent even, and this realisation was related to fear, to the 'Anything' of the work's title, until then four words, each alone and free.

For a long time I've wanted to compose musical scores from bits of text and coloured paper, and stack them on a shelf as a slowly amassing single work, or sentence (called 'Litter' perhaps), "as if the logic of fiction is one that pertains to the emotions" (Brenda Ludeman, Visual Arts Program); I've wondered what it would sound like, I always wonder what writing sounds like as music, or looks like as dance; and I'd been watching Junko Wada for awhile before thinking there was something familiar about her movement, not something I'd seen before, or understood, but something I recognized faintly, or more likely imagined; then it came: she's writing; it was like watching words come-about, pause, float briefly, and join-up like beads; I didn't like this thought, I chastised myself for misreading the contorted hands and the calm feet, and the body separated into many parts, all at once;

it seemed that each move interrupted itself (like a minor subversion) in its middle so that it was seen, insisted on being seen, and was isolated from what was otherwise fluid; still it persisted, this thought, the horrible ability (want) I have to align various forms to 'writing'; her body a type of stylus, acute, accurate—each move equivalent to the next—inscribing her dance into me, lightly; the engraving did not occur by harsh cuts, rather by repetitious and concentrated (condensed) strokes; the performance wasn't about grand vistas, it was some other spatial knowledge: a topology of small dove-tailing details: "(s)he is the worker of a single space, the space of measure and transport" (Claire Robinson, in *Folding Architecture*).

Junko Wada is not going anywhere (she's staying put, digging in), there is no journey other than thought (where she was sending me), and this thought is restless and malleable; it is simultaneous thought of here and of that other place so far back there's no known path; she writes: "back to when I was an amoeba-like single cell"; she's showing a confined, restricting, space, small white empty, to be intricate (to be an architecture folding and unfolding, to be flesh: "Her architecture would be ... a local emergence within a saturated landscape" [Claire Robinson]) and endless; that is, the space is strange—in parched geometry there is the naked written and writing body—and this strangeness is left alone by the soundscape of Hans Peter Kuhn; so, therefore, there are two separate works which throughout the performance remain distant (he's building, she's building, apart), parallel, creating, for me, yet another space (a third) which belongs to neither, which belongs to the audience (a gift, if you want); the soundscape is as minimal as the dance; and I don't remember its shapes, instead I remember single sounds, single events—rain, and to my chagrin the almost too-human ones, his whistling, his voice singing a Marlene Dietrich song, the pouring of the white wine into two glasses, and his footsteps across the floor to where she stood, waiting, and the handing to her of a glass, to toast the idea of 'ending' (I liked the music because it did not mark the dance, it did not drive or state, it was comfortable being there, present, and available at will) and this brought me right back, with a thud, to the 'real' of human display—to humans performing for humans, in diverse and delicate ways—which chronicles and archives the immeasurable and the unchartable, fleeting fragments (have I told you of the

three dresses, red, yellow, blue, of how they worked 'against' the body, making its utterance somehow more live, and awkward too?)—and then not so much as 'noise' but as 'objects' or 'positions' in the space where I was, where the watchers were, skirting the dancer's square, leaving her 'room', her work, to her; the third space is a prolonged interval then—where thinking is invited, a thinking between, in this case, movement and sound, or dancing (as it comes from the inside out), and music (as it goes from the outside in); and this making, imagining, of the interval, or plane, by bringing into proximity, but not interweaving, two very considered forms—one that stretches, reaches to the limit, and another that rests, resides with slight tension—collects nowhere else but in oneself (who is saying nothing, while the gathered cells, a universe, are now at the bar taking their first post-show sip, putting themselves in, edging themselves toward, a state of speech [to borrow from Barthes]).

Losing time

Maryanne Lynch

Who's Afraid of Anything?

Junko Wada and Hans Peter Kuhn
Space Theatre, March 5

1. The audience sits motionless and silent for one hour. Entranced, in trance; on tenterhooks at the same time. In the performance space before us are two figures: a Japanese woman and a German man. They are dissimilar but complementary. I try to deconstruct this and realize that we, the audience, are in this too. Not invited but placed. Any analysis must include us, this darkened mass.

2. In Saturday's *Advertiser* I read a letter of complaint about the 3500 KILOGRAMS OF RICE being used in Cloud Gate's *Songs of the Wanderers* (the quantity is always what's important, irrespective of the attitude). The correspondent criticises such "wastage" in a time when people are needy. I wonder what she'd make of Junko Wada's one-hour meditation on the palm of her hand.

3. There are four speakers placed in four parts of the Space Theatre. The sound surrounds us. It shifts between a 'rural' clarity, muffled industrial noises, an almost imperceptible mewing (did I really hear that?), and a temple-like bell. The sound directs us through a variety of states—not always comfortable—which are hardly

named. It's as if Hans Peter Kuhn moves us beyond cognitive thought; this soundscape is subconscious. Is this, in part, what holds the coughs, crackling papers and the shift of buttocks on a seat?

4. Eye movements. Junko Wada looks up or looks down. Always to her palm. Only rarely does she assume a level gaze—it's not at all level and is distinctly unsettling. There's almost a smile as one eyelid contracts and expands with the tiniest of movements. I'm thrown a-kilter. There's nothing here to hold on to; nothing to give me that "Ah, yes" glib sense of recognition. I'm forced to engage and engage and engage; it's relentless but also tranquillising. That word has been misappropriated: I'm passing through and within a site where the prelingual dominates. The intelligence at work is overwhelming.

5. A confession of sorts. I wasn't moved by *Songs of the Wanderers* the way some were. It was a little too theatrical for me; a little 'insincere'. I don't want to be rude but sometimes people can be too polite. *Who's Afraid* is another story altogether. It's not a matter of the banal approach of "I liked this. I didn't like that". I'm trying to work out how different states have arisen within me. I felt stripped bare in *Who's Afraid*. I lost consciousness of time and, mostly, of myself. I was being forced to endure such intensity that there wasn't room for other things.

6. Things slow down. A hair moves. Stillness. It's explosive. I'm about to explode but I don't care. Colour, no colour; song; silence. The performers raise their glasses and smile with each other and with us.

Music of the steps/Soundsitting

Johannes S. Sistermanns

Akio Suzuki

The Elder Lunchtime Series
Elder Hall, March 5

Suzuki is walking in a magnetic field of infinite possibilities. His music isn't played by any musical instrument in the first part of his concert. I listen to single tones, going higher, deeper, reverbs, technical irritations caused by his walking through a secret set-up of small transistor radios—they become musical instruments. He folds, later unfolds thick sheets of paper, walks from the left to the right side of the stage, walks with two radios. The sounds are as silent and fragile as

you can imagine, one can hear the noise of the late-coming audience. Suddenly a ringing mobile. He creates a plane wherein every sound—expected and unexpected—noise from the audience, becomes integral. Everything can be music, it only depends on the way we listen to it. And this is each person's own decision how much music is in every noise, sinus tone, sigh.

Suzuki's music is also visually present in his movement. The way he moves his body through space evoking sounds creates a stage presence of a far-reaching-out and speaks of a Tai Chi trained mind and body. No hustle, no streams of notes, no rush—contemplation gives us space. I wish we had more musicians with that mind-body consciousness while performing.

Suzuki's either consciously or unconsciously connecting with 'the sacred and the profane'. His sound art is perception, nature, tenderness, freedom, the everyday relation of man with his environment. He doesn't demand anything. The listeners are free to step inside his soundworld, though he offers a strong concept to approach, to follow, and those who are not touched by his spatial sounds are free to stay where they are or to leave. No one will be drawn unwillingly into his sounds. We must have once honoured music in past times much more than now. His music touches this honourable sphere, a sacred place, of the ethereal and ephemeral existence of sound. He is singing this particular quality into existence. Sound, noise, today is always and everywhere, everyday, this is the profane part of it. When it is honoured, maybe, and music is uploaded with spiritual energy, it could turn into the sacred.

The way the 57 year-old Japanese sound artist—who trained in architecture before starting out in 1963 on his sound performances and sound research—unfolds a cotton square with a little stone flute is a piece in itself. With this flute he cuts from the air of the conservatively designed Elder Hall an imaginary landscape. This moment reminds me of the Spanish art historian Marina Gallasch's short statement, that an artist is someone who has seen something and at the same moment lost it. Yes, he uses technology, but low technology, often no technology: concepts determine the use of *technic*. His is more an act of framing, focusing, than anything else, so as to discover and to free the sound-reality of a

tone, a tone in space, its dependence on a space and in the same moment its capacity to overcome, leave the performance hall, go beyond ... Sitting, walking, breathing, moving hands, breathing, singing, thinking, breathing, sitting again, standing, slowly walking singing a few words performing, still, listening, soundsitting. As a composer, music/composing starts for me with listening, and enables me to leave his sounds for a deeper listening.

What is music? Definitely only a five letter word. Music is what will be sung, breathed and not what has been expected.

In the mix

Keith Gallasch

Voice, Jam & Videotape

Barrie Kosky, Contemporary Music Events
Mercury Theatre, March 6

This is a strange experience; not weird, not wild, but odd. The odd opportunity to see one video several times and to read it differently (or not) each time because its soundtrack changes, each video voiced in a new way. I say voice, because voice, sung and spoken, is pivotal in this performance. Onstage three female singers, sometimes four, synch into spare soundtracks, adding to instrumental and/or vocal lines, or going it on their impressive own. As a music concert it's mostly great, and gets better as it goes.

Often we don't 'hear' soundtracks (even when moved by them), unless they're as obtuse as the *Titanic*'s or packed with favourite tunes, unless we're soundtrack addicts. In *Voice, Jam and Videotape* image and music are almost in equal partnership. "Almost" because it's the videos in this performance which are repeated, not the musical compositions. Each video enjoys the benefit of two or three accompaniments. Although this is a Contemporary Music Events' gig, it's still a matter of music servicing the videos. (CME has produced another show where you sit in a cinema and listen to music without film.) Kosky tries to keep the balance by placing his singers next to the screen. By the last showing, I know what I'm inclined to look at.

Tyrone Landau, Raffaele Marcellino, Elena Kats-Chernin and Deborah Conway have created compositions that warrant multiple hearings. this could not be said of the viewing of the videos. Elena Kats-

Chernin's score for Judy Horacek's animated *The Thinkers*, about The Stolen Children, was exemplary, matching this artist's whimsical style with a musical cartoon language just serious enough to sustain the message. It markedly improved my (limited) appreciation of the video, amplifying its moments of magic—especially its images of flight. David Bridie's score for the same video, including the voice of Paul Keating, while politically pertinent, laboured the point, making the cartoon curiously twee. Deborah Conway's composition for Lawrence Johnston's *Night*, a Sydney Opera House reverie built from close-ups of roof-shell details (tiles, edges etc.), added an aural density and a sense of the architectural space dealt with—many voices inside the Opera House, spare visual detail on the outside. Conway appeared (discreetly in the dark) at the opening showing adding her own voice to the multitude, the musical quality not dissimilar from that she helped create in the marvellous soundtrack for Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books*.

The one video that worked for me and that worked at me with the help of its composers, was Donna Swann's *dis-family-function*. I'm usually not fond of narrative short films, but the almost silent movie, family-movie innocence of the work with its blunt edits and nervy close-ups (and none of these over-played), is engaging and I was more than happy to watch it twice. A gathering for a birthday party for an ageing mother starts from several points until the characters converge for a backyard party and the giving of gifts. Landau's reading is relatively dark, male voice and piano, other male voices added, finally joined by the live voices of the onstage women singers. There's something faintly disturbing about the score, a kind of restrained (almost Brittenish) poignancy, an inevitable unravelling of feeling and never a literal response. The onscreen image of the mother sinking into herself after the gifts (dog bookends, dog statue, dog pictures, a real new dog—in the presence of her elderly-barely-willing-to-budge old dog) is sad. Raffaele Marcellino's score is just as good, but much closer to what I imagine the videomaker might have had in mind. Its opening, rapid lines of "ma ma ma", immediately signals a lighter, everyday mood, and you don't go looking for the video's simple seriousness, that just hits you later. But in the choral work, as in the Landau, there's something oddly holy

generated as we watch these strangers—the mother, the dog, the son with his Indian girlfriend, the gay couple, and the young parents with baby, lolling in the sunlight, the near-but-never-to-be drama past.

Down here, on the ground

Maryanne Lynch

Material Evidence

Martin Grant and Julia Morison

Artspace, Adelaide Festival Centre, March 4

I've been thinking a lot about vertical and horizontal spaces lately. Australia, you might say, is 'a land of horizontal plains'—literally, the suburban sprawl, the vast interior, the mighty continent; but also, the grubby, grasping desire to pretend that we are all one people, a classless society of like minds, and fuck off if you put on any airs or speak in a foreign tongue. Not that there are no signs of other spaces here; what I'm referring to is the John Howard version of ourselves.

But where is verticality? And what is it? The hallmark of classic Gothic architecture was this reaching up towards God by material means—the Christian God of course (who else but the Christians would be so presumptuous?). Arches and spires, an excess of endeavour, the deliberate over-extension of human frailties cast in stone. In contemporary Australia, still marked by Christianity and definitely Gothic, verticality perhaps resides in the hidden sorrows of the land and its peoples, the long, slow, rising lament of untold stories and unhealed scars. Not only the Indigenous peoples but all those whose wailings and weals have risen up into the relentlessly blue sky and hung there, shimmering, like a mirage at the end of a track on a bone-dry day.

This may seem a roundabout (or zigzag)—not to mention overdetermined—way to arrive at *Material Evidence: 100-headless woman*, Grant and Morison's exhibition at Artspace as part of the 1998 festival, but it's the use of space in the show that has remained with me. The work comprises ten 'dresses' which hang from ceiling to floor in sheens of satin, silver, gold, muslin and so on. The dresses tower over me and yet don't intimidate me. They are soft, vulnerable, beautifully damaged. (Damage ... now there's a word.) I could say, "Not another show about women's oppression", but it's not and I don't. Instead, I am caught in the flowing lines of

the material, the hope of a cut-out shape laid down on the ground beside a column of rolled lead with the outline as a ghostly remainder of what once was.

That Morison has chosen elements from the Kabbalah as the node point for each piece only reinforces this melancholy. She reminds me of the lamentations of those who are unheard: I witness a pair of shoes lying beneath a vast, empty space and a single coat hanger ("Ash") and shiver a pathetic shiver. Indeed, I saw the show by chance at night, after my first visit, and was unnerved by its silent scale as I made my way past. Mute museum pieces but alive in some uncomfortable way. On my way to dinner, I felt that I was leaving something behind, frivolously, which I ought to protect.

I don't want to ignore the Jewish reference here but Morison has chosen elements that seem to reach down (and up) into many peoples and many histories. Australia, on this reading, is only 'one among many' sites of conflicting spaces—if painfully conspicuous in its flat denials. It's no coincidence either that these are dresses, but once again the work seems to go far beyond a female-male divide. The 'dirt' that marks each piece emphasises the infinite cries that, for me, well up and touch the sky across time, race and gender.

There is mounting pain; and I am stuck on the ground looking up, looking up, looking.

Ceremony for the soul

Linda Marie Walker

Flamma Flamma

Elder Park, February 27

I loved *Flamma Flamma*. Maybe I'm a sucker for requiems, which I know nothing about, being Methodist. Longing, probably, for all the mysterious spectacle, for candles and incense and robes. And especially for these at night, for these on the street. I'm a sucker for big or small public events—if I see the police-greys I'm on the alert for ceremony. If I find myself in a traffic-jam, rare in Adelaide, then I'm wanting to know what's going on, what 'excitement' am I missing. It's not that I 'believe', it's more that I sense a type of chaos. A type of unravelling, or danger. So, thirty thousand beings at the same spot at the same time thrilled me. I was at the back—being pushed off the road onto the footpath by security-men, being covered in white ash by the flares—arriving just after 9pm. High on *La*

Tristeza Complice (is it wise to be nourished by sorrow, I didn't ask myself then, and now I'd say I was buoyed by desperate madness—is all madness desperate, is all desperation mad?). There I was (soon), standing on the back steps of the icecream stall, Elder Park framed by a metal window, watching this far-off pageant without my glasses. I didn't care I was distant, it seemed the boats on the river were actually burning, I thought I heard the fire-brigade, and hoped King William Street was still blocked off. The music could have gone on forever, or had been going on forever, I couldn't quite decide, I was happy to be at its premiere. I was inside—well, no, on the edge of—a Requiem, the sacrifices of fire were made, the water received them (the Torrens looked like a real river). I was with a friend who at first was sceptical, agitated somewhat, worried about all this "religious stuff", but soon she too was pleased to have witnessed such a brief and rare touch of the sacred, in public. Perhaps we were watching death. Or, life, the life that comes after the souls of the dead are given repose. I didn't notice the corporate logos, of which apparently there were many, and I'm sure the souls didn't notice; I didn't mind that the sun on the crane didn't shine, and I'm sure the souls didn't mind that either. It was all so fantastically ordinary—things fail, the show goes on. And then it's over. When the souls of the dead are at rest, then the ground is at peace. And the air is cleared.

Detour here

Maryanne Lynch

If it's Friday, it must be *Salamandrar*. A black box inside which an angular figure tries to provoke me with the turn of her head. But I'm removed from the action, looking at the view, on my square seat in the back row. *Seven Streams*. We sit cosily, on couches built for two, exchanging licorice and comments with the woman next door. There's a relaxed feeling to the crowd; perhaps it's the sentimental trimmings of the Thebarton Theatre as much as the deceptively casual way scenes unfold that cause this goodwill. I'm at a carpark, up on the top floor, and there's a demountable stage and a very small audience scattered among the metal seats below. This is a Fringe show, *Kissing the Goldfish* (I've been dragged along), and the lighting changes are brutal: from red to blue to yellow, splashing onto us too. Later I sit crosslegged on my floral bedspread and look up at the girl smiling at me from the frame of a very floral oil painting.

I am mapping a festival. The routes I am taking or being taken on; the places I enter and leave; the currencies of theatre and how we all sit in our seats and applaud when we're sure that things are through. Which reminds me, on the plane on the way over I read an article about the most effective way to clap. Research has found that placing the four fingers of one hand against the palm of the other produces the greatest sound. I tested it out immediately (as did my companion ten minutes later) and have been testing it further over the last ten days. I think I'll have to wait until I'm in a room full of people all doing the same thing in order to be sure of the claim. But what I think right now is that I'm moving through spaces at a dizzying pace.

But it's a bit naive to talk of moving through spaces. I'm part of them and they're part of me. At *Who's Afraid of Anything?*, for instance, the sound surrounds us and Junko Wada. We are in this together—with Hans Peter Kuhn, sound artist, as mc—even as the conventions of lights down, silent and stationary audience, and applause at the end are preserved. I shift in and out of playing my part, at times focusing only on the body on the white square, at other times on the drumming rain and the toc-toc-toc bells, and at yet other times on myself in relation to these elements: spatially, emotionally, cognitively. (I'm later told that Kuhn—who designed the space—works out these relations with mathematical precision.) I know something's going on.

Is there? That's what I always wonder when I come to Adelaide. This funny city that is described by outsiders as being weird. I look in the faces of passersby, trying to spot an Adelaidean, to uncover some secret about the place, can you pick the difference? All cities have their gory stories but murderous myth-making is really big here and I get sucked in and feel all goose-pimply as I walk around the streets, looking for clues. I'm laying preconception on preconception, partly because I've been doing some research about Adelaide lately and am now finding past and present are seriously out of whack inside my head.

And matters aren't helped by the ghostly manoeuvres of sound, light and body in most things I attend. Well, there's a split, actually, between the main festival and the Fringe: what I've seen of the latter tries to draw us in by the old 'audience participation' trick, whereas the former

draws us in by setting us apart from the action and stilling us. Not that this split is so neat, nor is being stilled always peaceful. In *Snakesong/Le Pouvoir*, for instance, that wonderful woman who plays the Queen fixes us with her gaze as she asks us, "Do you want to see my tits?" We're stunned—but also on her side, lit too, and feel as if we could just reach over and grasp her hand if she wasn't so far away; it's the playing, again the clever invitation to feel relaxed, this time by the vernacular and the knowing sideways looks, but also the way the piece has drawn us out of our chairs and into its warmth. And at the same time scared the bejesus out of us with its sudden interruptions of form and manners.

Manners; yes, manners. It may be bad manners to gossip but here it's positively healthy. Snippets of information are a commodity; the more one has, the higher one's status. It's a grab-bag of biographical details, grievances and speculation, and all the more enjoyable for its unreliability. It makes a change from the respectful silence of most audiences in the High Art end of town—even as it's the very same people who are dealing in this blackmarket of rumours. I usually only have small change but that's not small beer here.

And after the beer ... More nights than not I've found myself walking wearily past the Zoo on my way home. Only recently did I discover a much shorter route, but if I hadn't taken the long way round I'd have missed a quiet stretch of the Torrens where the sounds of festival life are a distant hum. I need these moments in between the noisy bits, occasionally discovering them during a performance or, again, hours later, when thoughts and emotions have filtered through me, but usually not. The festival traffic is heavy and increasingly requires that I find my own way home.

Don't talk to me about reality

Virginia Baxter

Forum: *Conspicuous Consumption*
Piano Bar, March 7

Who's Afraid of Anything
Junko Wada & Hans Peter Kuhn
The Space, March 5

Lyrebird
Tyler Coppin
The Price Theatre, March 6

This Most Wicked Body
Nigel Kellaway
Odeon Theatre, opens March 10

Word is the Adelaide Festival Centre is awash with lost property.

In Nigel Kellaway's *This Most Wicked Body* which opens this week, there is real food, prepared by a real restaurateur—one of the best, Gay Bilson who it should be reported arrived safely in Adelaide after driving a car full of pickled lemons across the Hay Plain. Really. In the first version of *Wicked Body* staged in Sydney in 1994 at The Performance Space, performer-writer Nigel Kellaway lived in the theatre for ten days, performing at eight every night. The performance at Adelaide's Odeon Theatre will be more conventionally framed. However, each night he will invite a member of the audience to join him for dinner. Gay Bilson refuses to divulge the meal to be served. She will only say that food for such a show needs to be "sexy". When I saw it, the appearance of the food provided one of those magic moments when the theatre frame shatters to reveal something other.

In theatre, food is usually faked or substituted. For Gay Bilson who has conceived many food-related performances, if the performance is intelligent, the food should be, but should not be there to show itself off. For the first version of *Wicked Body* she based the meal on the music, Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, beginning with a tomato consomme and building the dishes each night from those that had gone before, finishing like the music, back at the consomme. Listening to the food forum I began to wonder what this development might mean for theatres as we know them. Already contemporary performance has lost the black box, the curtain, the proscenium arch, the fixed seating. Should we be finding places for full kitchen facilities in the theatres of the future?

The food aside, Nigel Kellaway sees *This Most Wicked Body* as a work which plays with the real. Each night the performer speaks a mixture of personal truths and monstrous fabrications in which his silent dinner guest is occasionally implicated. Echoing ancient etymologies (see, you learn things at lunchtime forums), 'host' and 'guest' are both strangers.

In the remarkable *Who's Afraid of Anything?* Junko Wada and Hans Peter

Kuhn find a new architecture for the black box. She performs on two white squares of precisely five metres. He occupies the peripheral space, activating from a laptop his four-channel composition through four speakers in the four corners of the room. She performs three pieces based on three states (*jo*—introduction; *ha* which breaks the lines; and *kyu* which leads to the final statement) wearing three colours (red, yellow, blue). Junko Wada's dance has its roots in Noh theatre. She says: "My object is to trace my evolution—back to when I was an amoeba-like single cell—in a state of intensified consciousness" (Souvenir Guide). The movements appear to spring from a place of deep memory. In her performance we find something of ourselves that we thought lost. She bends at the waist, her hands in some pre-formed state, feet like soft claws. Her face conveys no emotion, just concentration and ultimately a kind of bliss. She reaches up, out, arches back. She is led by her own hands. She turns in on herself. Hans Peter Kuhn activates the sounds which are never quite identifiable—sounds like the big drops after rain, cries, voices, a crackling like fire, bamboo hitting against itself like a chime, monstrous crickets, bird whistles. At one point, he whistles into a microphone, then sings an old Marlene Dietrich song. At the end of the third piece, he clinks two glasses together, then opens a bottle of Petaluma and pours. As the two meet on the border of the white square, in a small rearrangement of muscles for one who has come so far, Junko Wada's face finds its conscious composure. I don't think I will ever lose its imprint.

The Price Theatre's black box has a little stage built into it for *The Lyrebird*. One look and I know I am back in the land of the rubber chicken and the cordial claret. Curtain and proscenium combine in a gauze through which, in the opening scene, Tyler Coppin appears as Robert Helpmann in a performance of *Don Quixote*. The rest takes place in the interval in Helpmann's dressing room. Appropriately, he addresses the audience through a fake mirror. Aside from the accidental glimpses of the actor beneath the impersonation and his onstage manipulation of the lights, the only real element in *The Lyrebird* is the cigarettes, which are lit but never smoked. (And just as well! The cigarette has been well and truly ostracised at this smoke-free festival. There are signs up warning the audience whenever cigarettes are to be smoked on stage and all the public ashtrays order: "Butt Out"). As a piece of impersonation *The Lyrebird* has its

moments, especially when Coppin finds the ghostly Helpmann underneath the Don Quixote wig and beard. Not possessed of Helpmann's long-limbed dancer's body, he mostly uses his face to pull off the transformation. The lips point the way, a petulant pout leads the rest of the body, interspersed with head turns for drollery and head back for put-downs. I know this kind of thing requires the audience to keep its distance but before long I start imagining it somewhere smaller, more intimate. It's well known that Helpmann wasn't at all taken with the real, so there's a lot of make-up in *The Lyrebird*. You have to admire Tyler Coppin for the considerable skill he has applied in this attempt to graft another body onto his own. In the hints of Helpmann's frustration, sadness, and anger, he finds some hint of depth but an awful lot is lost under no. 55 beige.

Both Tyler Coppin and Nigel Kellaway would claim their work as theatre—though very different kinds. I would call one theatre and one performance. Junko Wada calls her work 'dance', at the same time saying, "I have always tried to thrust myself into a state which far transcends the formality of choreography". These days, the term 'Performance' covers everything from ritual acts to embodiments of states of being and can even take in feats of impersonation—it's still losing and finding itself. While most of the audience is ecstatic about Cloud Gate's *Songs of the Wanderers*, many leaving the theatre weeping, there are some who want to know exactly what it is we witness in this performance. Is it real transcendence we find or over-emotive choreography? Hans Peter Kuhn says (though not of Cloud Gate) if a performance is skillful, he will find the emotion. For him, it doesn't seem to work the other way around. At the end of *Songs of the Wanderers*, the audience applauds the cast and separately the chikung practitioner who stands throughout the performance on the side of the stage with a stream of rice falling on his head. They remain in their seats, touchingly silent, well after the curtain call, observing the solitary act of raking rice. The raker recovers from his 'meditation' to take a bow. This work draws its inspiration from religious practice but calls itself 'Dance Theatre'. As with the Whirling Dervishes at the 1996 Festival, Cloud Gate throws its audience into an ideological spin. In her essay in the program, Sarah Brooks says "Although *Songs* is replete with references to actual religious practices ... the audience need not recognise these in order to respond

to what is taking place. In fact, this kind of intellectual sorting out ... might well work against its spiritual effect". While what constitutes that spiritual effect might be hotly debated, there is no argument about the rice which is realer than real, even if it is dressed for the stage. It is present in glorious and frightening profusion, tons of it falling from the flies, raining down on the performers, filling the theatre with its smell. Like the real horse in *Carmen*, when it appears, something miraculous happens—something like the stage moving closer.

All I can say is that it's an act of God that Hal Foster (*The Return of the Real*) will be in town for Artists' Week to set us straight on all this damned reality stuff once and for all.

Reeling from reality, I took myself down to the Asian Gourmet at the Central Market to partake of something uncontroversially real only to discover that the current owner Lin McGregor is actually offering a recreation of the original Mrs Koh's remarkable recipe for Singapore laksa. The arrival of the real food provides another of those magic moments. I take a mouthful. Though the laksa leaves are dried now and the little clams are missing, in the combinations of ingredients in my bowl, the world still comes together.

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