

THE AUSTRALIAN

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Nerve-tingling night of dance



Exquisite refinement: There was not a superfluous moment in de Quincey's *Nerve 9*

Picture: Russell Emberson

JUST the other week it was possible to go to four contemporary dance programs in Sydney on the one night — quite a collision of events for a city that's not exactly a hotbed of such activity. New York it ain't.

Was it funding coming home to roost for everyone at the same time or lack of communication? Whatever the reason, the quantity was there. What of the quality?

Head and shoulders above the pack was Tess de Quincey's *Nerve 9*, a piece of such exquisite refinement that not a moment in its 56-minute length was superfluous or wasted. In fact, forget the head and shoulders — de Quincey and her collaborators in vision, sound, light and text (this is a true multimedia work) were on another plane altogether.

In an intensely gripping opening, de Quincey emerged from intense darkness to be enveloped in a collage of image and sound (especially those of women's faces and voices) through which she moved with the physical and inner concentration informed by her long association with *butoh*. Every slight movement — the twitch of a finger, the tilt of the head, the angle of the body — became magnified and open to interpretation in this sombre, challenging piece.

Over at One Extra, dancer and choreographer Michael Whaites offered an

Dance

Bodies

Newtown Theatre, Sydney.

One Extra

Seymour Centre, Sydney.

Ichiro Harada Dance Group

lo Myers Theatre, University of NSW, Sydney.

Tess de Quincey

Performance Space, Sydney.

engaging study of friendship and life's journey — both actual and metaphorical — in *Achtung Honey!*, in which the audience followed him and the delightful Celia Brown around the Seymour Centre. They named cities to one another and created movements; she talked about bread; he took a phone call. She had a vibrant solo; he had an anguished one restricted to a small corner of the Seymour Centre's upper level. At the end there was a tender, multi-stranded duo.

The second work, the overlong *Oysterland*, was billed as a celebration of women. I'd hate to see the critical version. The familiar women's fears and insecurities — fat, looks, clothes — got an airing. *I Will Survive* even made an appearance. Boring.

The three performers (and collaborators with Whaites), Kay Armstrong, Julie-Anne Long and Jan Pinkerton, were excellent, but as they veered between taking this nonsense seriously and taking the piss, it was hard to get a grip on what they wanted to achieve.

Ichiro Harada's eponymous dance company offered a generous program of six works. I had to leave at interval (to go to de Quincey), but saw the first four. A forceful solo for Harada, drawing on his Japanese roots, and the often cheeky and whimsical trio *Chairs for All*, were most successful. One admires Harada's open-hearted approach, his energy and commitment, but not his editing.

At *Bodies*, the annual four-week choreographic showcase, 40 new works reared their heads. Perhaps the four associate artistic directors could have been more ruthless in their winnowing, and there was an awful lot of introspection that didn't add up to much, but each evening brought a couple of memorable pieces and the extensive use of live music was a treat.

There were many people making competent, entertaining dance, but few with that spark of originality, depth of perception or exceptional skill to niggle at the imagination long after viewing.

Who still lingers? The *Pondue*. Set

was lively and funny as a tragically trashy group out on the town in *Evening Magic*; Michael Montgomery gave his stunning dancers tough, combative things to do in *Arena*, although overall the piece was somewhat unfocused; and in *Point of View* Liruna Stamell showed she might be short of stature but has the soul of a dancer.

Jason Pitt's *Otto* evoked a powerful atmosphere of mystery, and his dancers were strong and beautiful; Shelagh McGovern's aerial piece *Catch* was unusual and thoughtful; and Flavie Hahme's *A Flavour of Argentina* was pure (and highly expert) exhilaration.

The audience adored Clair McHugh-Shahani's well-structured, easygoing *Lazy Days* and Stephanie Glickman, in her work *Tall*, was a mesmerising powerhouse.

Young Terry Kohler is still at school but shows immense promise as a ballet choreographer, last year with *Deciso* and this year with *Figures in a Landscape*.

Looked at objectively, Jose Calarco's *Portal* was a huge mish-mash, yet his melding of Aboriginal, classical Indian and flamenco dance was heartfelt and musically inventive.

Deborah Jones