

New Territoires
Company Didier Théron
Tramway, Glasgow
Mary Bernnan

***** / five stars

The title, Harakiri, primes a degree of anticipation so that thoughts of samurai warriors, death rather than dishonour and a ritualistic suicide are already lurking before a lone female figure pads onto a dim-lit stage and, in total silence, contorts her limbs into calligraphy of ultimate despair and fatal resignation.

Actually, even if you didn't know the title - had no cluster of associations to colour your perceptions - this piece would unerringly take you to a timelessly bleak landscape where courage and stamina are of no avail : the rigours of unyielding circumstance will eventually break you in body and spirit.

Theron's choreographic vision of this process is harrowingly dramatic, yet totally unhistrionic. His six sombre dancers stay expressionless throughout. Even when, at different points in the ritual formations, one or other will break away into a frenzied, jittering solo, it's as if the individual is reflecting the inner turmoils of those who are dutifully toddling to and fro in the shadows.

As shoulders bow and feet slog in rhythmic unity, these dark-clad figures take on the oppressed nature of huddled masses in need of respite. Pale hands thrust heavenwards - in anger? Bewilderment? Pleading? It's part of Theron's consummate shaping and juxtaposition of such re-iterated gestures-and a tribute to his dancers - that, as the soundscore piles on the decibels, the emotive significance of each detail is expanded, amplified. That visceral hara-kiri stab acquires sad echoes of mea culpa penitence, even as - like birds, driven by migrating instincts - the dancers wheel and trot, shackled to their remorseless patterns of behaviour until, as here, they drop ... A piece to make the heart ache, and the mind seethe : shockingly brilliant.