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Dublin Theatre Festival 2015: 'Dancehall' dazzles the dark

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Dancehall

Rating: ★★★★★

In a place of smoke and dark shadows opposites attract and repel in a dramatic new work “Dancehall,” by choreographer Emma Martin in collaboration with composer Andrew Hamilton. Juxtapositions of stacks of neatly piled clothes with gatherings of empty beer cans littered about the stage, or of its trio of tuxedoed musicians with its five casually dressed dancers, reinforce performative dichotomies on the journey from form towards freedom, the collective towards individuality, all to a dark, hypnotic soundtrack. Always it begins and ends with the dancer, following that first impulse, coursing through the body, that strives to dance freely through a shower of silver or a snowstorm of gold.

Two opposing halves make for a very powerful whole in “Dancehall” which neatly divides itself into two contrasting sections, each informing the other, both linked by gestural motifs. Initially slow to

start, the first section is dominated by a uniformity of dress, long sustained musical notes, a droning soundscape with little percussion and with sequences of movements often executed in slow motion. The gaze is always seeking the music, the form, the other dancer, as groupings emerge and dissolve, seeking shapes and patterns. Connections between bodies are tentative and fleeting and the whole moves slowly, like an irregular heartbeat. A clever interlude and costume change and the second sequence moves from impulse towards moments of ecstasy and abandon. Music is almost physical, faster, rhythmic, pulsing with strong percussion. Movement sequences quickly form with a wild, kinetic energy as bodies chase one another or passionately connect, embracing with arms and ragged breaths, till it all comes home in a moment of brief but striking beauty.

With composer Andrew Hamilton, director and scenographer Emma Martin has crafted a dark, dramatic work that inhabits a haunting, liminal landscape. Dancers Oona Doherty, Alistair Goldsmith, Arad Inbar, Anna Kaszuba and Kevin Quinaou create some powerful visual moments, with sequences of often stunning power and beauty. An often looseness in synchronicity allows for the individual expressiveness of the dancer to emerge in response to Hamilton's dark score, performed live by Crash Ensemble's William Butt on cello, Lance Coburn on piano and Alex Petcu on percussion.

The "Dancehall" of the title refers to the Public Dancehall Act of 1935, still in place today, which sought to censor and restrict the body's expressiveness through dance for fear of carnality and sexual immorality. But "Dancehall" aspires to more than just a challenge to censorship. It seeks to harmonise the spiritual nature of the psyche with the primal, physical body to achieve release. With its powerful moments, a rich, minimalistic soundtrack and visually arresting performances, "Dancehall" is a stunning achievement that does indeed find its moments of ecstasy.

"Dancehall" by Emma Martin with composer Andrew Hamilton, co-produced by United Fall, Emma Martin and Dublin Theatre Festival in association with Crash Ensemble and VISUAL Carlow, with production support by Dance Ireland, runs at The Samuel Beckett Theatre as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival until Oct 11th

For information on times and tickets visit [Dublin Theatre Festival](#)



Chris O'Rourke
Theatre Examiner

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