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Dispatches from The Fringe - Constellations is poetic, dramatic, visceral beauty

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Constellations
PaperDolls

Constellations by Paper Dolls

Rating: ★★★★★

A furious, rhythmical clanging fills the street outside D-light Studios. The audience, in small groups, are ushered up a darkened, steel runway to the performance space. Inside the high roofed studio ropes and swings hang from the rafters. Cushions are dispersed around the dimly light space where the audience gather. Slowly the performers emerge. Sitting in the centre of the room they bind the arms of two members of their eight strong ensemble as the audience continue to take their places. *Constellations*, PaperDolls remarkable interrogation of risk, is about to get underway with the ultimate exercise in trust.

PaperDolls don't pull any punches. The opening floor sequences saw bound performers place themselves in the hands of the ensemble in an act of total faith. Quickly followed by a sequence of aerial acrobatics, three performers took to the trapeze and executed a repeated pattern of

physically punishing movements, pushing the body to the limits of physical endurance. A clock ticks and metronomes click as five female performers individually bind and tangle themselves in hanging ropes. This sequence was less satisfying as pace lulled and much of the energy dissipated, aside from one section of the space where two bodies hurled, grappled and collided in mid-air.

With the audience moved to another area where four thick ropes hung from the ceiling, the final sequence played itself out. An aerial ballet of power, poignancy and precision that was breath taking and beautiful both in its vision and execution. The industrial metal soundscape created by Wolfbait who played live on the night, created an overwhelming and overpowering score that consumed all in its path like a brush fire and contributed to the sense of danger, tension and foreboding. Costumes, lighting, music, location all contributed to *Constellations* mood, atmosphere and intensity. But it was the body as a site of strength, power and endurance, yet infinitely fragile and vulnerable, that provided the true commentary. This was perfectly realised in the final image of an exhausted body suspended by its ankles from the ceiling, swaying gently as the audience walked away.

In *Constellations* it's a question of limits. It's about questioning limits, about risking, pushing beyond and, if unable to escape, then transcending those limits. The struggle is itself freedom. At the place where words become silent, *Constellations* speaks. And what it has to say is a visceral, violent, poetic response to its own questions of risk and engagement, transcendence and self. This is art in the tradition of Grotowski's Total Act, where performance creates an encounter with the spectator and both are transformed in the process. Many aspire to it. Few achieve it. And fewer do it with such courage, strength and integrity as PaperDolls remarkable *Constellations*.

Constellations runs at D-Light Studios, North Great Clarence Street, until September 22nd. Show begins at 8.30 p.m. Tickets are €14.00



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