

AXS ENTERTAINMENT / ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT / PERFORMING ARTS

Dublin Dance Festival 2015 – A horse of a different colour

May 20, 2015

5:55 PM MST



Jockey by WillFredd Theatre/Emma O'Kane
Sarah Jane Shiels

Jockey by WillFredd Theatre/Emma O'Kane

Rating: ★★★★★

Prompted by a desire to learn to ride racehorses, and seeking a deeper understanding of her grandfather, race journalist and bloodstock agent, Philip De Burgh O'Brien, dancer and choreographer, Emma O'Kane undertook a personal journey. 18 months ago she began training as a jockey never having been near a horse before. This coincided with a year long collaboration with WillFredd Theatre on *Jockey*, a dance theatre production that aims to show that racing is in the blood. *Jockey* aspires to explore the physical relationship between the dancer, the jockey and the Irish thoroughbred horse. This it achieves extremely well. But this also serves as its bridle, reining it in a little too tightly.

Throughout, *Jockey* stresses the mantra of rhythm and technique and parallels between dancer and jockey are exquisitely realised. This is ably supported by a clever set design by Sarah Jane Shiels, at times resembling a race course, at others a dance studio. Here O'Kane executes a series

of fluid movements with focused, slow deliberation and director, Sophie Motley, sustains that same, focused deliberation throughout. Occasionally there are welcome bursts of energy as O’Kane lets loose, perfectly realised in the sequence depicting bookies and punters. But these are few and far between and, for the most part, a palpable sense of tension lingers throughout.

This is reinforced by the story of Philip De Burgh O’Brien, which recounts his involvement with the racehorse, Red Cardinal, who died tragically, with a little bit of De Burgh O’Brien dying that day also. This is wonderfully recounted using excerpts from Philip De Burgh O’Brien’s own writings, interspersed with racing footage, projected onto screens to the back of the stage. Here we see the obsessiveness and precariousness of the racing life painfully realised, culminating in heartbreak. Tension, once again, is dominant, accompanied by an overwhelming sense of loss.

In the final sequence O’Kane meticulously describes the body and posture of the jockey during a race, telling us the experience is incredible. But this sense of the incredible never fully translates to the audience. In some respects *Jockey* feels like something of a departure for WillFredd Theatre. While the dance sequences are beautifully realised, WillFredd’s characteristic playfulness and charm is little in evidence. This might have helped loosen the reins a little and release a real sense of the joy, energy and exuberance of the racing world to go alongside its more demanding aspects.

Jockey preaches to the converted and those with the inside track will undoubtedly find much to appreciate here. For non-believers beyond the fences, and for devotees of dance, the opportunity to watch O’Kane’s graceful and consummately executed dance sequences is well worth the price of admission.

Jockey by WillFredd Theatre/Emma O’Kane runs at The [Samuel Beckett Theatre](#) until May 22nd as part of the [Dublin Dance Festival 2015](#).

Show begins: 8.00 p.m.

Tickets: €22 Concessions: €20 Early bird: €17

There will be a post show talk Thursday 21st and the performance on Friday 22nd will be captioned for those deaf or hard of hearing.

For more information go to:

<http://www.dublindancefestival.ie/>



Chris O'Rourke
Tulsa Theater Examiner

© 2006-2015 AXS Digital Group LLC d/b/a Examiner.com