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Dublin Dance Festival 2016 'Betroffenheit' is a near heavenly hell

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Jermaine Spivey, Tiffany Tregarthen, Bryan Arias, David Raymond, Cindy Salgado and Jonathon Young in *Betroffenheit* by Kidd Pivot and Electric Company Theatre

Michael Slobodian

Betroffenheit by Kidd Pivot and Electric Company Theatre

Rating: ★★★★★

"In My Father's house there are many rooms," or so goes one biblical description of heaven. In "Betroffenheit" this could equally serve as a description of writer Jonathon Young's personal hell. A room with two doors but no real exits, where voices, memories, addictions and selves wrestle for salvation. Or damnation. Or simply to be able to inhabit that place where you're there but not there, where there's nothing left to be found but the one thing left to be found. Choreographically stunning and featuring a masterclass in light, sound and set design, Canadian companies Kidd Pivot and Electric Company Theatre's "Betroffenheit" is a visual feast exploring the extreme states of trauma, addiction, grief and bereavement.

Deeply personal in nature, “Betroffenheit,” created by Olivier Award winning choreographer Crystal Pite and writer, performer Jonathon Young, was inspired by Young’s traumatic experience in which his daughter, niece and nephew were killed in a fire during a family holiday in 2009. A German word which translates poorly as consternation, “Betroffenheit” employs text, sound, movement and light to craft often stunning images which follow Young through his process, addiction and attempts at recovery. Visually appearing to reference Marilyn Manson in places, “Betroffenheit” often looks like American Horror Story meets Silent Hill, with much of the former’s sense of freakishness. In this freakish and freak filled landscape, Young wrestles with his memories, his past, his PTSD and his addictions in a room haunted by himself as well as his drug induced, Vegas styled, cabaret freak show which parades, dances, haunts, wrestles, interrogates and distracts. Repetition is writ large, with depersonalized text abstracting verbal motifs which, like the original trauma, are constantly referenced and returned to via lip synced voice overs. All of which make Young’s defences and coping strategies potentially more dangerous than the trauma which initially inspired them.

A show of two halves, with both well served by stunning opening sequences, the first half is dominated by some of the most sublime images, relying heavily on light, costumes, make-up and set design, all of which are of the highest order. An early sequence with dancer Jermaine Spivey and Jonathon Young promises much. But a less organic, Vegas show routine which explores drug use, saps much of “Betroffenheit’s” intensity for a time, feeling as obvious, forced and contrived as canned laughter, even if the ventriloquist's dummy is a stroke of genius. Even so, the opening section also contains some powerful, visually haunting images, along with some stunning [dance](#) sequences heavily influenced by tap. It also contains one of the most riveting and visually arresting performances in the shape of Tiffany Tregarthen, whose extraordinarily disturbing and wonderfully articulated clown is utterly mesmerizing.

The second half sees “Betroffenheit,” choreographically, get down to some serious business with a vigorous group sequence followed by a powerful duet and a stunning solo, again by Tregarthen. With set reduced to a solid steel beam, and costumes and make-up pared right back to basics, Pite’s choreographic genius is allowed to shine through. Like flicking through a photographic flip book, Pite embodies the struggle, strength, tautness and fragility at the heart of “Betroffenheit” in a series of stunning, yet fleeting, tableaux, including an exquisite Pieta. These linger just long enough to imprint themselves indelibly on the mind’s eye before Young's final monologue sets up a quiet yet powerful ending.

Pite’s choreography and direction ensure performers Bryan Arias, David Raymond, Cindy Salgado, Jermaine Spivey, Tiffany Tregarthen and Jonathon Young are each outstanding, with Tregarthen being an absolute revelation. Technically “Betroffenheit” is also at the top of its game. Composition and sound design by Owen Belton, Alessandro Juliani and Meg Roe, at once haunting, tender and thunderous, is utterly compelling. Costume designer, Nancy Bryant also excels, particularly during the first half. A masterclass set design by Jay Gower Taylor is perfectly complimented by Tom Visser’s incredible lighting design, with both being standard bearers in precision, mood and technical excellence.

In bravely crafting his traumatic experience into a memorable piece of dance theatre, Jonathon Young, with collaborator Crystal Pite, ensures “Betroffenheit,” goes to the hell experienced by those who shut down, who live at the extremes of trauma, barely surviving, yet return to share the experience. Its relentless wrestling and repetition excavates deeper and deeper layers which the body articulates at the point where words fail. Granted, it doesn’t all flow all of the time and text often reinforces a sense of distance rather than connection. But when it does connect, the experience is utterly compelling, with “Betroffenheit” offering one of the most visually memorable and emotionally powerful performances of the festival.

“Betroffenheit” by Kidd Pivot and Electric Company Theatre runs as part of the [Dublin Dance Festival 2016](#) at The O’Reilly Theatre until May 25th

Doors open 7.30 p.m.

Tickets: €32.00 or €28.00 concession

Post show talk with Willie White on Wednesday, May 25th

For more information, visit [Dublin Dance Festival](#)



Chris O'Rourke

Theatre Examiner

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