

Meaningful glance at family drama

THEATRE PEEPING TOM

By Le Salon. The Arts Centre, Playhouse,
October 22. Ends tonight.
Cameron Woodhead Reviewer

PEEPING Tom is one of few festival shows I'd gladly see twice. Through a fusion of physical theatre, dance and opera, Belgian company Le Salon weaves a beguiling tale of familial disintegration.

The artistic disciplines swirl around each other to create a character-driven drama of great suggestive power. At its centre, a grandfather — played by Simon Versnel, the lone actor in the ensemble — faces physical, mental and financial ruin.

Versnel makes an imposing clown. It's a comic performance littered with Falstaffian antics, many revolving around the unruliness of the ageing body. In one scene, he flamboyantly cuts tufts from his pubic hair with scissors; in another, he's in an adult undergarment, with water dripping in a mercilessly precise rhythm on to the stage.

If the grandfather is haunted by the spectre of death, he is also jostled by the generation that will succeed him. These characters are portrayed by dancers, and their claustrophobic domestic drama unfolds through startling choreography.

As Versnel's son, Samuel Lefeuve sets the tone. He breaks the opening tableau of grief and emotional paralysis, balancing on his head and launching into a decaying orbit of horizontal flips.

Lefeuve's style is marked by furious oscillation, torque and momentum. Reflexive and repetitive, it comes to represent self-involvement, the limitations of male emotional expression and, in one floor-hugging duet with Franck Chartier, the tedium of working life.

Bodily revolution takes a brilliantly sensual turn in a pas de deux from Chartier and Gabriela Carrizo, most of it spent joined at the lip, juggling



A beguiling tale of familial disintegration.

an infant between them. But the comic romance of the scene contains the seed of tragedy. Carrizo's character jolts and jags through surreal segments in which the loss of her child is imagined: from wild-haired, kimono-clad mortification to an alarming sequence in which she is ostracised from the family, buried alive in children's toys and family furniture.

The final piece of the puzzle is mezzo-soprano Erudike de Beul. Her performance slides over an eclectic range of songs and vocal styles, its subversive humour foreshadowed by a few cheeky bars of *Tea for Two*. Personally, I'd rather hear de Beul's art applied to Schubert lieder than Pink Floyd's *The Great Gig*

in the Sky. But none of the popular music comes across as self-indulgent. Indeed, darkly comedic quotations permeate the dance, too. Lefeuve, for example, creates an excruciatingly funny sequence composed entirely from obsessive attempts at the splits.

Peeping Tom assays desolating subject matter with the lightest of comic touches. The production's imaginative choreography, physical theatre and song might partake of the highest form of camp, but the humour and self-awareness never overwhelms. It's intimately observed human drama — so adroitly and mysteriously implied across three disciplines — that takes centre stage.

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