"Of movements and metaphors"

Review: Dance

HEROINE
Drama Centre Theatre/Last Saturday

stephanie burridge

Intense and absorbing, or predictable and boring? Taiwanese dancer Wen-Chi Su was a quintessential "female warrior" in a piece that was full of contradictions - irritating yet poetic, repetitive yet distorted, fluid yet fractured in its movement.

German choreographer Arco Renz's Heroine began with the sound of pulsating footsteps beating through the darkness as the audience peered through the low light to capture images of the dancer with outstretched arms.

This continued for a long time and transported the audience into a state of heightened expectation. The soundscape built as the lights brightened to reveal a dancer seemingly glued to the floor while her body reached out tentatively to explore the space around her, only to contract back to the safety of a controlled, balanced state.

While metaphors abound in this concept of a woman trapped between the cultures of the East and West, it is the vulnerability of the dancer alone in a vast space that remains with the audience.

By placing her on a platform, opening up the stage to reveal the bare back wall and narrowing the parameters of the dance to a small square in the centre, the choreographer focused the audience's attention on the dynamics of the dance.

Although the choreography began slowly with Su's back to the audience, it progressed through a small range of movement confining exploration to the space around the dancer, creating a complex mesh of diagonals, vertical and lateral planes. Every now and then a small jump, a sudden thrust of an arm or a quirky move would jolt the audience, before returning to the regular pace of the dance.

Not everyone's idea of an entertaining dance performance, Heroine engaged on a deep level and the dancer's commitment to the choreography was palpable. Su gave Renz's choreography authenticity and pathos. It was extremely demanding for both the dancer and the audience but the journey was worth it as a meditative study of movement and an abstract metaphor for the human condition.

The reviewer lectures at Singapore Management University and is the editor of the Celebrating Dance In Asia And The Pacific book series.