

## The Pneûma Project

### Responses to earlier showings:

“Breath becomes sound becomes music becomes meaning. Lights become shapes become beauty become meaning. A step becomes movement becomes dance becomes relationship. Miranda Tufnell's new work, *Pneuma*, does not tell anything as banal as these steps suggest, but as I watched its magical flow of sound, light and movement the play and interplay of elements kept evoking for me the wonder of human understanding - the development of ideas and realisation, the miracle of evolution as the mind emerged that could take the elements of everyday life and make them into stories and dreams. Art is the place where this miracle is represented and shared. *Pneuma* is a beautiful expression of what art is made of - the fusion of mind and the elements that make up the world, the most basic of which are breath and light. To watch *Pneuma* - and to listen to it and to allow it to generate thoughts - is let oneself lose into what it has meant to be human, and the way the human is defined by the way we find meanings. A soundscape is made by two musicians who create great surprises of beauty from a fascinating array of sources. A lightscape is created by projection of shifting, allusive images onto diaphanous and billowing curtains. A dance is made by three dancers whose movements beautifully evoke solitude and interconnection, isolation and relationship. The shape and interplay of these elements creates a feast for the ear, eye and imagination. Wonderful.”

Hugh Brody

“Here is a work that reflects a long standing engagement (since the 1970s) with essentially the same cluster of concerns within performance, namely: the moving body inhabiting space; improvised ‘pedestrian’ movement rather than recognizable dance steps, or established styles; the sense of ‘embodied presence’ in the performer; a personal sense of connection to surroundings, a sensory rather than conceptual approach to composition; and an engagement with other arts, especially music/ sound and visual material, via the use of space, light and projection. One should add Tufnell’s intense interest in all things natural - in life at a micro and macro level, in landscapes and the creatures that inhabit them, plus our own creations – the things we ‘make’, in any form, or sense of the word, when they approach the natural, the singular and the spontaneous – as hand-made objects often do. These interests (one might even say obsessions), do not imply standing still over the years, but rather a circling curiosity, turning and returning to the same things, trying all the time to go deeper.

But none of this conveys the delight that Miranda Tufnell and her team of three dancers, two musicians and a visual artist, conjure up in this 50 minute piece. The essence of the work is its capacity to engage the associative mind – it invites its audience to become absorbed and imaginatively active in response to a string of evocative images. They drift by, mutating from one into another. The particular version of the work I am seeing happens to be set in a church. As with most such buildings, it has a tall, spacious, and stony interior. With the emphasis of the title of this piece upon ‘breath’, we are reminded throughout of the airiness of things. Breathing, the essential accompaniment and rhythm

of our lives, links us directly to our surroundings – the body not a finite physical entity, but a continually interacting, evolving and mysterious set of processes – both tangible and intangible. Underlying all Miranda Tufnell’s work is the question: what is the body? To ask this question is to recognise that it/we exist(s) on many levels – personal, imaginative, perceptual, physical, mythical, social...the whole impossible to encapsulate, or ultimately define.” Chris Crickmay

“The music was incredible - emerging slowly from the movement of air and twisting and turning all through the piece.” Audience member

“The changing lighting patterns on the floor, and the swirling hangings, were beautiful and provided a context for the dancing, tying the performances together and feeding a sense of mystery.” Arnold Cragg

“It was such a rich experience witnessing ‘Pneuma’ in a new environment. When I saw the work at the Natural History Museum, I saw the work from high above and, probably the 'back', I loved the life force of movement and breath in amongst the column of animal skeletons walking two by two. I loved the extraordinary juxtaposition of daylight hours and museum life in amongst the pause and shift of the work. I could easily watch the performers moving all day and wondered about the myriad of their own stories that were held inside the one that they were translating, the personal and the transpersonal, the breath and the breath. I loved the two musicians walking with the breath of the accordions and no notes to begin with, just the bellows breath, I loved that they were 'in' the work, part of the piece so physically, their ages their heights their way of expressing through movement and instrument.

And then to see the work again in the church during Dancin’ Oxford, a different time and place, with added, light installation and sounds and moving air and another performer of a different age and a beautiful huge bow of wood. This time I sat close by, near one end watching forwards and sideways, everything expanding and dying away in many ways, in many moments. All so spare, a whisper, gazing through me and back on myself again. It was another work altogether and also the same call to breathe, me inside it and along the light pathways as I sat with and inside what arose. The live music cast their spell again.”

Hilary Neale