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Theatre

Oper Opis

Barbican, London

★★★★★

Ever thought you had finally got your life sorted - only to find the ground sliding away from under your feet? Then this show, which opens the London International Mime festival, is for you. Set on a precariously tilting stage and played out to a glorious scratched soundtrack, this work by the Zimmermann & De Perrot company is an inventive folly, a startling mix of theatre and circus that charts the shifting relationships of a group of people constantly forced to adapt and evolve to negotiate the ground shifting beneath their feet.

But the instability is not just on the ground but in the human form itself. A contortionist scuttles across the slope, part human, part crab, part hobgoblin; and, in another witty scenario, human bodies pass convincingly for the equipment in a smart gym. In one extraordinary sequence, a woman is tossed through the air and appears to turn into a chair before your eyes. The mix of skill, sleight of hand and sleight of eye is irresistible, and the piece has a gleeful magpie tendency - thieving from absurdism, popular cartoons, surrealism and modern dance.

While it's a hugely enjoyable 70 minutes, it lacks real warmth, and though the risk-taking is evident in every challenging circus feat, the show fails to fully develop the idea of taking risks as a theme. The performers are physically distinctive, and much is made of their differences - tall and tiny, curvy and rigid - but their interaction is underplayed. Still, I was open-mouthed in admiration. Here's another company proving how far circus has come, and how far it may yet go.

Lyn Gardner

*Ends tomorrow. Box office:
0845 121 6839.*

