

Gravity and Levity



Lindsey Butcher, aerial performer, dancer and artistic director of Aerial Dance company Gravity and Levity talks to Louise Bennett about the company's new triple bill *Shift*

LB: What is Aerial Dance and how does it inspire you?

LB: I'm not quite sure what Aerial Dance is... I'd say it was a relatively new art form which has attracted a lot of interest. There are a lot of people exploring it. My personal route to it was through working as a dancer for six years after leaving London Contemporary Dance School, then moving on to a circus company, where I started learning aerial skills. It was amazing to learn all these skills, even at such a late age. I think most dancers take to aerial work quite well as it gives you the freedom that you sometimes wish you could have on the floor, even though you can feel slightly restricted by the harness. While I loved doing the aerial work, I found that I was missing moving on the floor. It took a while for the penny to drop that perhaps I could mix the two. I loved learning the tricks in the circus company, but I started wondering about an artistic side to these skills. I wanted to push the moments in between the tricks and expand that movement vocabulary. In the last ten years there has been a real surge of interest from dancers who are looking for something different, and circus performers who are getting interested in developing the theatrical, artistic side of what they do.

LB: Tell me about the new mixed bill...

LB: It's three new pieces from three very diverse choreographers which really pushes the performers. There is a huge age range, which is very exciting as everybody really learns from each other. The first piece is a quartet by Charlotte Vincent. The next piece is a duet by Charles Linehan, and the final piece is a quintet by Luke Cresswell and Steve McNicholas, who also created *Stomp*. What I really wanted from them was a completely different slant on the form. With them, the whole set comes to life as well as the performers.

LB: The set is a very important part of the bill; why?

LB: The designer [Michele Weaver] and I wanted to create an environment which all three choreographers' work could sit in comfortably, where the design could influence the choreography, and at an early stage the choreography could also have an influence on the design. The set shifts and moves, playing with where the floor is, so although they are three completely separate pieces, there is a cohesive aspect that grounds all of them.

LB: What kind of opportunities are there for dancers and the wider public to learn these skills?

LB: The Circus Space [in Hoxton, London] offers training programmes and evening classes, there is a circus school in Bristol, a company called the Generating Company, and lots of small companies who all teach as part of their touring programme. When we go to the Linbury Studio Theatre at the Royal Opera House in April, we'll also be teaching masterclasses. People are drawn to the idea of flying or being weightless, and it's great fun to explore. ■

Shift opens at the Corn Exchange, Newbury on April 3 and tours until May 14. See Calendar for full details.

Jenny Paterson of Gravity and Levity in action. Photograph by Johan Persson.