

**Questo buio feroce**  
**di Jon Kaplan (Now magazine, 28/01/2011)**

Pippo Delbono's *Questo Buio Feroce* (The Wild Darkness) is like watching a live Fellini movie, one filled with memories, surprises and dreamlike imagery.

Compagnia Pippo Delbono's production, with creator/director Delbono himself in a key role, is inspired by a collection of essays by American novelist Harold Brodkey, written as he neared death from AIDS-related causes.

Composed of text (Italian and English), music, dance and a remarkable display of visuals, the non-linear show explores the relationship between life and death and the impressions, conscious and unconscious, that fly through our thoughts.

Set in a large white box designed by Claude Santerre and strikingly lit by Robert John Resteghini, the 14 actors – including Canadian performer Jeffrey Simlett, stepping into the production on opening day to replace an ailing company member – play out Delbono's carnival-like vision. The cast includes a number of non-professional actors, among them street people and others who, for various reasons, some would consider social outsiders.

Scientists in protective white gear herd patients into a line-up while a voice recites increasingly large numbers – population? those who are ill? – as we're witness to the tediousness of medical treatment and sometimes its cruelty: a scarred, blindfolded man is repeatedly lifted aloft and screams silently.

We're treated to a karaoke version of *My Way*, one that emphasizes the banality of the lyrics, while consumerism also takes several hits (some rather too easy) as part of the occasionally farcical action.

Sometimes episodes are overlong, such as that in which a woman screechingly recites personal ads, or don't resonate fully. Other sections, including that from which the title comes, reflect a calm yet powerful acceptance of our humanity.

But if what we listen to isn't always successful, the visuals are always striking. You won't forget a fashion show that features increasingly outrageous garb from various centuries and cultures (including a pope in towering high heels) and, later, a nightmarish, menacing group of figures in dressed in black. In between is a scene inspired by the Cinderella story. The inventive wardrobe is by Elena Giampaoli.

Among the special moments are those involving a pair of commedia dell'arte harlequin figures, one aged and one young, both charming actors. The elder walks with a cane and the younger helps him around the stage; their sweet, emotional connection is absolutely clear to us.

The tone of *Questo Buio Feroce* moves from anxiety to calm, best seen in the work of Delbono himself, who appears early on as a figure in white who moves to a jangled score; it's hard to tell whether the movement is a fit or a dance. He returns near the show's end, strips to his shorts and performs a similar choreography, now set to a gentler piece of music. What was disturbing is now touching and tender, the rictus on his face transformed into a look of joy.

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