

The Wild Darkness at the end of AIDS
di Robert Crew (Toronto Star, 28/01/2011)

TORONTO-It's almost a racing certainty that Questo Buio Feroce (The Wild Darkness), now at Harbourfront Centre's Fleck Dance Theatre, is unlike anything you have seen before.

The production, from Italy's Compagnia Pippo Delbono, is part of Harbourfront's ongoing World Stage. And if that festival's mandate is to present challenging, unusual, boundary-pushing shows, this one — with its blend of theatre and movement — certainly fits the bill.

Pippo Delbono adapted Questo Buio Feroce from Harold Brodkey's 1996 essays Wild Darkness: The Story of My Life, written as he was dying of AIDS. It is presented in English and Italian, with occasional English surtitles.

It takes us inside the mind of the poet during his journey through the valley of the shadow of death. It is fantastical, strange, unsettling.

It opens with a blinding white light and a thin man crouched on the floor. The stage gradually evolves into a chilling hospital waiting room where numbers are shouted out as everyone waits, and waits, for treatment or diagnosis. Strange patients sit patiently; white-coated technicians move in and out.

From there, the poet's journey takes us ever inwards. There's a brief evocation of pain; it's clear that this is a battlefield. Then one of the ensemble sings "My Way."

And onwards. Seemingly random thoughts and memories are sparked – of an Italian family in Ohio, a bitter reflection on our acquisitive, capitalist society, a sense that the whole world is dying along with the AIDS sufferer.

There's a feeling of carnival as a grotesque kind of fashion parade takes place, complete with a couple of Harlequin figures. There's a section on loneliness, the dating game and sexual fantasies.

Suddenly Cinderella and several ugly sisters appear, trying to squeeze their feet into a shoe and win a dance with Prince Charming. There's a vision of a funeral, complete with a group of family mourners that are first cousins to the Addams family.

And so to death, with a final image of sailing on calm waters into peace.

This is ensemble work of the highest order, a blend of theatre and movement that's disciplined and precise, with every moment carefully shaped.

It's a remarkable product of Pippo Delbono's vivid and unique theatrical imagination, a cool and unsentimental vision of the last firings of the brain's synapses. For me, there were odd moments that didn't quite add up and times when a little more warmth and humour might have served well.

That said, catch it if you can. It has a short run, ending this Saturday.

[Torna su](#)