

Playful sensuality on display

A substantial crowd was treated to some very exotic fair last night at Showplace.

Vancouver's Holy Body Tattoo, consisting of Naom Gagnon and Dana Gingras, brought their latest creation Circa to the stage, and with it a rich tapestry of sumptuous depravity and playful sensuality. With startling cabaret-style music written and performed by the Tiger Lillies, Warren Ellis and Steve Savarin, this program enthralled the audience with its intoxicating mixture of wit, power, charm, drama and emotion. Interspersed with filmed segments by renowned filmmaker William Morrison, this program provides imaginative imagery that elicits a variety of emotions.

As the curtain rises, two lone figures stand face to face at the centre of the barren stage.

Crushed red velvet curtains, reminiscent of a more elegant time, form the backdrop. The spare music starts and the figures subtly begin what will be an hour's exploration of fine lines. They move gracefully around the stage, under the warm romantic lights of tiered chandeliers. The co-ordination of the movements depicts an ever deeper intimacy as the dancers find shelter in each other's arms. From this intimacy comes the raucous joy of physical intimacy, but looking at the world through the eyes of a lover colours

one's perceptions. And making oneself vulnerable can lead to great pleasure, but also helpless in the face of torment. Danced to the strains of Send in the Clowns as performed by England's notorious Tiger Lillies, lends the perfect air of irony.

Next comes a fast-paced section illustrative of the western world's demanding intensity. The performers rise and fall. Come to jarring stops and pop, arms in the air like they've been shot. But they rise again to fall, and over and over, as electronic jungle music pulses at a merciless tempo. Then it stops. The tango returns. Suddenly, there is eternity in a caress, and so one is fortified to face the onslaught. This time the dance is freer with large, playful swings of the legs.

The pair appear oblivious to all else but each other. But the play begins to become competitive, and then turns to the quest for dominance. And so begins a slow decent into depravity as the world interrupts with its demands and the magic is forever lost.

Our first solo is from Naom Gagnon and has him moving as

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though he's fighting the demons that want to possess him. One wonders when attacked, how long can one endure before lashing out and attacking in turn. The tango begins to become erratic and halting. The two lean into each other for support, but are at the same time burdened by the other's weight. The grace has left them and their relationship now, and will not return, regardless of their commitment to remain together.

The entire performance is imagery run rampant. The lighting, designed by Marc Parent, succeeds in emphasizing every emotion and aspect of the program. One of the more startling images appears near the program's end. Side lights intensify to reveal a tango that has devolved to appear as though two headless corpses are staggering about the eerily lit stage, as ever more eccentric cabaret music wails a tale of a misspent life among the human dross. This superb program provides a wealth of images and ideas into its seamlessly constructed hour. From the audience's reaction at the conclusion of the performance, it would appear Holy Body Tattoo has succeeded in creating a following in this neck of the woods.

And deservedly so.

Jonathan Fiddler is a theatre buff and freelance reviewer for The Examiner.