

FREEDOM at The Lowry, Salford Quays

Jasmin Vardimon is a British-based Israeli-born choreographer who founded her company in the UK in 1997. An Associate Artist at Sadler's Wells, Vardimon has created more than ten shows for her fiercely imagined company that demonstrate a desire to create innovative dance theatre with huge imagination, physicality and breadth of vision; exploring ideas about politics, relationships, society and the worlds we inhabit. Freedom is her most recent show and marks a long overdue return to the Lowry – their first since 2008.

The show explores ideas of freedom and what that actually means to us as a concept and as a reality. Freedom has a non-linear narrative with a series of interlinking characters and situations that progressively lead the audience through various scenes and realisations back to the starting point, which, seen again with the knowledge of the journey taken seems familiar but disconcertingly strange. Watching the show one realises how much freedom depends on the permission of others, how freedom is something that we create or take for ourselves but that can be taken from us with alarming ease, by others and ourselves. There is the idea that true freedom means a freedom from fear, whether that means the freedom to be ourselves or the freedom to exist without threat or danger – remembering that fear is a key element of our self-protection.

The show opens with a genuine sense of dark and magical wonder but progressively explores different kinds of darkness, illuminated with touches of humour and magic, and moments of huge exuberance and joy, all delivered with complete conviction and physical fearlessness by the six performers. Different ways in which people express and experience freedom are offset by images of captivity, control, restraint – even when that is a pleasurable thing. The set design by Guy Bar-Amotz is a fantastical and versatile jungle of wires, netting and plastic tubing that, with the nocturnal and magical lighting by Chahine Yavroyan, creates a literal jungle – a place of freedom and joy and exploration and hidden dangers; somewhere to run free but somewhere that can entrap and entangle – essentially a huge whirling metaphor.

Alongside the physical performance, the show features an eccentric and diverse soundtrack – Led Zeppelin, John Lennon and Roy Orbison, ambient electronica, kitsch, nature sounds and more (sound and movement designed by Vardimon herself) – playful digital animation (by Jesse Collett), text and puppetry, and even a spot of classical ballet. The choreography, created with the cast, is either highly physical, the group blurring the boundaries of their imaginary landscape and sometimes challenging each other with extraordinary almost recklessness, or incredibly detailed either in gesture or animalistic sinuousness – strange and beautiful. Luke Burrough, Kai-Wen Chuang, Esteban Fourmi, David Lloyd, Aoi Nakamura and Julia Robert Pares are striking individual performers and wonderful as a group, conveying a vast array of emotions and ideas through wonder, joy, exuberance, playfulness and passion and desire via cruelty, possession, control, madness and rage. All six are outstanding, demonstrating an impressive array of skills, strength and emotional connectedness and freedom – there's that word again.

Freedom is not a simple show. You sometimes wonder where it is leading you but it is hugely watchable, impressively performed, beautifully staged, occasionally baffling, and at times thrilling and cinematic, at others dark and intimate. It's the kind of show that is challenging, puzzling, revealing, strange, and leaves you with questions and thoughts to disentangle at the end. And that's a good thing. That's a kind of freedom.