

**"This work is daring in its goal-setting and searingly successful in its means. The dancing serves to expand the emotion, tension and the penetration of Vardimon's concepts about our psychology."**

If you thought total theatre could not include dance to extend language, think again. Or introduce yourself to the Jasmin Vardimon Company. Well before well nigh on two hours of action concluded, Justitia, and moreover Vardimon, had convinced me at last the concept was viable. The theory is easily imaginable, far less easily conjurable. Musicals work this way but without dance being integral throughout. Yet attempts until now to use dance alongside speech to convey, elaborate and expand upon narrative in a drama has resulted in often ludicrous contrivance and absurd banality.

Justitia is a thriller. But would you have dancers acting, speaking and moving on stage to perform an Agatha Christie? Justitia is a courtroom more complex than that.

Vardimon, who operates out of Brighton and whose skill, insight and observation already qualify her as a city treasure, tackles the twin issue, she said after Monday's performance, of guilt and real justice.

Her Justitia (commissioned by Gardner Arts Centre as well as Sadler's Wells and three others) proclaims that no matter how agonising a reality and knife-thrust is guilt, true justice may prove impossible to determine.

To throw a crime, an apparent murder, under spotlights from several angles and therefore many points of view suggestible to a juror, is not new. In comedy, Alan Ayckbourn's *The Norman Conquests* showed happenings seen through three different windows and actually occupied three plays, ideally seen sequentially.

Vardimon's perspectives on whether the wife in a love triangle was guilty of murder or manslaughter, and what was her exact motive in several different possible scenarios, left us only guessing.

We might have had an inkling by the interval, when the play's excellent barrister, Mafalma Deville, invited the audience to ponder. But by the conclusion most were unable to give a confident verdict.

As for guilt, the final revelation and twist, confessed by YunKrung Song's stricken character, served as a sobering reminder of the weight of responsibility upon jury members.

Vardimon is of our times, and at the forefront of them in her territory of art. After Tanja Liedtke's *Twelfth Floor* showed at this venue earlier this month that the late German was at the cutting edge, Justitia took the eager Corn Exchange audience at least one stage further.

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She appears in a subsidiary eighth role, mainly separate from the seven main characters, who are performed by four acting-speaking-dancing men and three women.

They are acrobatic and powerfully direct. There is some staggering and even dangerous ensemble work. And they need a head for heights and a mind for safety on a wall through which upright chairs positioned sideways form a bizarre climbing grid that in a final tableau acts, through its protruding feet on the other side, as almost a bed of nails.

The scenery is a revolving, three-segmented pie chart creating three interlinked rooms in which only one — the scene of the crime — is constant.

It is an ingeniously creation and a resourceful vehicle for extra choreographic and dramatic scope, executed by Miraculous Engineering to the brief of costume and set designer Merle Hensel.

There is here an extra element — sculpture — identified by Tate Modern curator, Catherine Wood. And Sadler's Wells chief executive and artistic director Alistair Spalding spots immediately that the characters, instead of being speechless, flat-dimensional moving dance images, are fleshed-and-blooded out. And where words fail, dance (like music) supercedes.

The music is hugely varied, from Vivaldi and Purcell to the contemporary, instrumental and song, and descends from the advantage of our modern, vastly eclectic and catholic heritage.

Vardimon's work, as exemplified here, is a tours de force in communication. The Israeli is stretching a European tradition of dance theatre across to our shores. Only now, it seems, are we British at large ready to embrace it. Next week on tour, the French will be lauding it.