

Can You Feel It?

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A woman and a man are standing at the back of an empty stage. They stand apart. They face the audience. They stand barefoot. They stand still.

The lights remain up, the audience continues to talk.

Then a twitch. The woman's eye. Another twitch. The man's lips. Then a shoulder. Now some fingers. Another shoulder. An elbow. The man's head tips left, the woman's mouth opens. They jerk. They spasm. The twitches go deeper, burrowing into their bodies, bouncing into their joints, running up their spines and racing up their noses. They are making unfamiliar noises, as well as cries, grunts and gasps. They are anguished. They are afraid. They are trapped. Perhaps they are being born. Perhaps they are insane. They are tearing at their clothes, pulling at the cloth. They are trying to get out or maybe get back in. They stamp the ground and punch the air. Is there some alien body coming to life inside them? Is this a choreography of horror?

They are moving closer now – closer to the audience, closer to each other. They look at each other, they look at the audience. The woman hooks my gaze and I try to look away. She runs towards the man. She touches him and he cries out in pain. She runs at him again. She pokes him. He yelps. He is neurotic, and I am laughing and a woman sitting across the aisle is laughing too. We look at each other, we laugh more. Everything is moving. The man and the woman are spinning around each other, bouncing off each other, heated molecules, faster and faster and faster and faster.

Now I am losing control. I am laughing and I am twitching. My mouth is opening when the man's mouth is opening. My body is swinging with the movement of his body. The drama is leaking into the audience. I look around me and I see other people looking around them. I try to watch the audience while watching the woman and the man on stage. Everyone is moving. Everyone is twitching. Or have I imagined that?

The woman and the man keep shifting their behaviour between the absurd and the profound, the erotic, the tender, the unnerving, and the hilarious. There are flashes of slapstick perfectly performed. Frank Spencer blinks into memory. From particle physics, adult personalities rise up and burst out. The man is lying on the stage, face down. He is snogging the stage floor, not quite fucking the stage floor. It is potent and piss-take and pervy. The audience becomes self-conscious. The man continues to writhe and twist and rub.

Now the woman is rolling and writhing, and the man is stepping around the edge of the stage, pulling in the lights from the boundaries. He is dragging the lights onto the stage, shining them on the woman, changing the colour from white to Amsterdam pink. The woman's legs are spreading. She is leaning back, shouting, screaming. She is in labour. I look at my knees. I try to keep very still. But her body is manipulating mine. The boundaries of the stage have crumbled. We have been absorbed.

Now the lights are everywhere, planted onto the stage, forming a forest of trembling lights, lights that are shaking and struggling. The man and the woman wrestle with the lights, loving the lights, exploiting the lights, losing patience with the lights.

I am loving the persistence of this performance – the swerving, the circling back, the concrete form. I love watching the woman and the man writing their bodies on to the stage.

The man slips away. The woman stays. She sits down on a chair near the centre of the stage and Nina Simone's voice fades up. I feel ecstatic. She's singing 'Feelings'. She's teasing her audience. Testing her audience. I'm trying to work out why this particular performance of hers was chosen for this production. And that desire to understand deepens when the performers start wrapping themselves up in brown paper and bubble wrap. Are they homeless? Are they gifts? Are they rubbish, or pollution? Perhaps they are simply having fun. I could watch them wrapping themselves up for ever. I love this final section, but I haven't a clue why it is here.

A few days later, walking through Epping's forest of trees, I am struck by a certain realisation: the show – Can You Feel It? – is about the course of life, from birth to death. Almost immediately, I wish I hadn't noticed this narrative. I don't want my imagination to be so tidy. I want my mind to keep twisting through the theatrical Japanese knotweed of a stage crawling in lights and electric leads and bodies and paper. I don't want to make it make sense.