

Tune-up does this vehicle a real service

May 7, 2010

MORTAL ENGINE

Sydney Theatre, May 5

Until May 15

Reviewed by Jill Sykes MORTAL ENGINE has been developed and refined since it had its premiere at the Sydney Festival two years ago. Since then it has toured the world from Edinburgh to Mexico City, Salamanca to New York, as a prized offering from Melbourne-based Chunky Move, and it is good to see the shape it is in now.

Shape is the operative word: it is better than it was. Two and a half years ago, the intriguing electronics of movement triggering lights and music dominated the action. Now there is greater substance in Gideon Obarzanek's choreography, more from careful attention to detail than radical change - subtleties and pinpoint climaxes among the broader sweep of engrossing lighting effects created by Frieder Weiss, Robin Fox and Damien Cooper.

Movement is still constrained by the tilted floor - shifting from slight to steep to a wall - on which lighting patterns can be displayed in a variety of relationships with the performers. But the sinewy suppleness of the dancers offers plenty to admire as they practically turn themselves inside out in sequences that tend not to range far from one spot.

Yet it is still possible to be seduced by the "dance" of the lighting in all its variations, from geometric designs that fall on the performers to shadows that encase them - to let your attention wander from the efforts of the excellent dancers.

The finale is wave after wave of laser light forming an underwater green tunnel that embraces the audience.

Ben Frost's music can sometimes be scratchy to the ear, but the sound is well balanced: soft to loud, it is never deafening.

My heart still beats faster for the memory of the brief solo Glow, which was the prototype for this more ambitious work. But Mortal Engine is stronger this time around and worth seeing - for the first time or again.

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