

The Herald

Mortal Engine, Playhouse, Edinburgh

*Star Rating: ****

Just as you're thinking "this'll be tough to dance on", the steeply-raked stage for this production by Australian company Chunky Move becomes a screen, with animated whorls and zip-zap lines slicing across as if marking it out as new territory. Later, these projections will take sole possession of the space, covering it with patterns that radiate an antsy-edgy energy while high-screeching sounds drill into your skull - and it's fascinating, but alienating. It heightens the sense that this is a curiously hostile environment for humankind, where every move will be (as indeed it is) monitored by watchful technologies.

Think infra-red cameras, computers, projectors and lasers - all in constant, and instantaneous, reaction to the choreography devised by Chunky Move's director, Gideon Obarzanek. At times it seems the surface projections show not just the physical encounters between bodies, but the emotional thought processes, too. Bodies arrive, rolling and stretching, with a sooty shadow-aura almost masking them: when they come together, it's all engulfing, even predatory.

A couple - ostensibly in bed - merge to become one, but almost immediately the longed-for connection produces an urge to regain a separate identity. The ensuing shape-shifting Rorschach blots, underpinned by a soundscore of slurping-squelchy suctioning and unstickings, turned passion into a devouring monster. Elsewhere, tiny scuttering black blobs resembled some sci-fi evil - or perhaps human fear or aggression - pouring in and out of a host body. Seriously toe-curling, though not every image was grotesque or cloaked in inky dread. And if the technology was impressive, the flesh-and-blood dancers were outstanding - though the vastness of the Playhouse (and the lack of total black-out) didn't do any of this full justice.

From yesterday's later editions.

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By MARY BRENNAN

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