

Caesarean Section: Essays on Suicide, Battersea Arts Centre – Review

Teatr ZAR

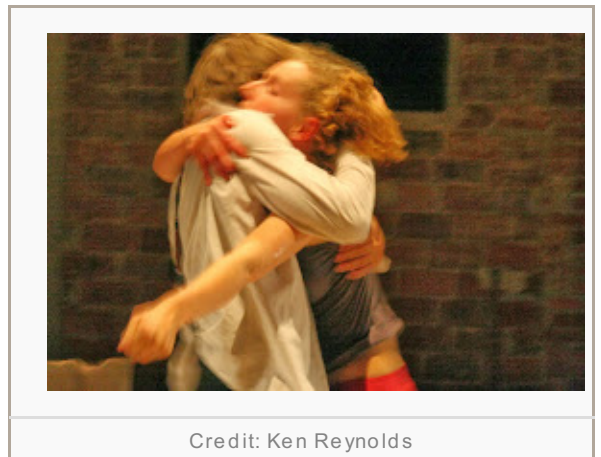
★★★★

Pros: Intense and stirring polyphonic music that brings a subtle power and energy to the entire play.

Cons: As the title suggests, this show does not make for a hugely enjoyable experience and can make you feel uncomfortable.

Our Verdict: A heart-wrenching meditation on suicide and survival, marrying haunting sounds with sensual movement.

It begins with a pitch-dark room, the sound of pattering feet, shrill laughter, heavy breathing and the sudden, excruciating crash of broken glass shattering across the floor. This sets the scene for a strangely beautiful yet haunting performance that captured me and has not yet let go. In *Caesarean Section: Essays on Suicide*, [Teatr ZAR](#) presents a metaphor for suicidal compulsion and the involuntary force that pulls us back from the edge. However depressing this might sound, it is actually as much about survival as it is about suicide and self-destruction.



There is not much of a narrative structure to the play, which might be better characterised as expressive dance interwoven with different disciplines and styles. Two nameless women, performers Ditte Berkeley and Kamila Klamut, and one man, Matej Matejka, prowl around each other, reach for each other, touch one another and are connected by some mysterious force that seems at times evil and ruinous and at times tender and intimate. I realise that this is a very hazy description, but that is because the play seemed like an obscure maze of images, sounds and feelings. The programme does not assist audience members much and the synopsis is full of chapters elusively called *Tenderness*, *Conversation by Spilled Wine*, *Dream*, *Miscarriage* and *To Remove my Skin*. Despite the lack of narrative, the tension is never broken, and I felt myself powerfully drawn to the three characters with strong ambivalent feelings of hatred and admiration, frustration and compassion.

One scene that sticks in my head is that of a woman straining towards a ray of light in the sky, trying to reach it by standing on a chair, climbing up another performer only to be constantly, relentlessly, pulled back down before she attempts another hopeless and agonizing ascent. There are other particularly gripping moments such as a woman letting shards of glass fall into her eyes, dropping them like silver but deadly teardrops. A lot of very dark images are evoked as the performers show us the determination that lies within the frailty of the human condition. The stylistic darkness that permeates the show is enhanced by a lighting design that throws up deep shadows and bathed single figures in pools of light. Equally stylistically, red wine flows, but it stains the floor like blood.

My favourite part of the play was the polyphonic music that drew on ancient traditions from Corsica, Bulgaria, Romania, Iceland and Chechnya. Teatr ZAR attempts to show that theatre is as much about hearing as it is about seeing and the music most certainly is as expressive as the dancing and acting. The

chillingly beautiful melodies filled the whole Council Chamber at the [Battersea Arts Centre](#) with overwhelming intensity and sent shivers down my spine. This is a powerful piece of immersive theatre that draws its audience in without having to actually engage them physically.

The last scene, which is ironically silent, will stay with me for a long time. Not giving the audience the opportunity to relieve the tension by applauding the actors at the end breaks the convention of theatre-going and adds to the thought-provoking discomfort we are left to deal with. In the same vein, the constant, never-ending ticking of the metronome, which continues after the houselights have come back on, gives the play a clever continuity. It will be hard to escape the dark notions of blood and splintering glass, but what I will ultimately remember is the outstanding talent this performance brought to the stage.

Please feel free to leave your thoughts and opinions in the comments section below!

Caesarean Section: Essays on Suicide runs at Battersea Arts Centre until 18th October 2013.

Box Office: 020 7223 2223 or book online at <https://www.bac.org.uk/>