

THE TIMES

Schrodinger at the Arnolfini, Bristol



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Reckless Sleepers was formed in 1988 out of a desire to create performances that deal with “realism in an unrealistic way” and to try “to convince unconvincingly”. In this playful and ingenious revival of this 1998 show, this aptly named UK / Belgian -based company uses the medium of theatre to examine scientific theory.

This hour-long production, which is touring the UK this month, is named after a Nobel Prize-winning Austrian physicist whose greatest claim to fame is a “thought experiment” in 1935 that questioned quantum mechanics. In it Erwin Schrödinger posed a paradoxical situation in which a feline placed in a sealed box with a capsule of poison is deemed to be both alive and dead at the same time.

Springing freely off this idea, this highly physical, company-devised performance lends new meaning to the theatrical term “black box”. There’s nothing standard or predictable about it. The set is a huge box constructed out of chalkboard, upon which the five-strong cast scribble and draw, and which has trapdoors on all sides, into and out of which they slither or pop. The intermittent spoken text is drily clinical, sometimes based on numerical patterns, or patently contradictory. The props are functional — tables and chairs and, later, many bottles of water that are either guzzled down or used by individuals to furiously wash away the markings that others make.

Strange things occur as a result of people behaving in a furtive, potentially violent and yet cyclical manner, and most actions are usually not what they might at first seem. A man drops through a ceiling and someone immediately traces the body as if in a crime scene. There are allusions to magic when a cloth is pulled from under a bottle on a table and, later, a suit coat from beneath a woman’s feet. Two men repeatedly exchange hammer and briefcase in a threatening game of keep-away. A couple whose heads are swaddled in sheets are yanked apart before they can embrace.

It climaxes in an extended scene of watery chaos. What Reckless Sleepers is implying in this cunning, comic and resonant show is that everything — including human emotions such as love — is absurd, even dangerous, but vital. You might, like me, be thinking about it for days afterwards.

Tour details: reckless-sleepers.co.uk

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