

Schrödinger – review

Arnolfini, Bristol

★★★★★

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A performance piece stemming from the quantum theories of Erwin Schrödinger – he of the cat that is simultaneously dead and alive notion – sounds heavy enough. But a restaging of that original work after more than a decade of the company further pondering its hefty ideas could seem a leaden prospect.

But nothing could be further from Reckless Sleeper's dynamic take on their original 1998 work. It's got a new cast and some tweaks, but the same alluring blend of philosophical richness and hypnotic visuals used to explore giant concepts with a stylish lightness.

The set is unchanged: a black, windowless box that could be a bunker, a place for scientific experiments to be monitored, or a prison cell, with trapdoors and hatches opening into it for surveillance and interventions. Within the space, five performers act out scenarios and rituals seemingly without rational motivation: they obey commands to participate in ruinous drinking games; they try to label images on cards and get them wildly wrong.

Thoughts swirl as you watch. Plenty is happening, but it means nothing; there's a furious attempt at expression and communication, yet it repeatedly reveals its own futility. Certain knowledge, represented by lots of shiny green apples on a desk, is impossible in this gloomy enclosure; you're just left with the apples.

It all builds into a final maelstrom of hysterical, desperate attempts at significance. The performers cover every surface with chalk marks, bizarre and illegible, and then the rain comes in to wash them away. This would be an existentially terrifying finale, if it wasn't also a haunting, beautiful, dramatic scene. That black box might well, in the final analysis, be a metaphor for the mind, but it is also a space for gripping physical theatre.