

Petrouchka

Edinburgh Playhouse, 4 Sept 2009

Reviewed by **Malcolm Rock**

The marionette, moor and ballerina become an acid punk, masked strongman and feathered showgirl in Scottish Ballet's modishly restrung *Petrouchka*.

At the Edinburgh Playhouse the Shrovetide Fair has been schlepped into a Moscow parking lot where black-market merchandise is smuggled in sight of street dancers and gypsy buskers.

Choreographer Ian Spink and designer Yannis Thavoris have conjured a credible contemporary scenario for the Mafioso magician (Erik Cavallari) and his performing peons danced by Daniel Davidson, Victoria Willard and Tama Barry.

A patchwork of billboards and bleak, high-rise housing backs the action in which a huge automated meat truck reverses onto the stage and opens like a garage door to reveal a locker room in which Petrouchka beseeches his chorine innamorata while fending off his indignant rival.

There is precious little dance in this ballet, which is not a criticism as such. In favouring storytelling above imperial steps Spink pays homage to the Ballet Russes original in which a character-danced second act is bookended by fussy crowd scenes of choreographed acting. But it means that Stravinsky's denticulate score, with its exhilarating highs and brooding lows, is not fully exploited by Spink. In the worst case it is used to attend break dancing that is a bad fit on classically trained bodies.

Petrouchka (Davidson) and strongman (Barry) engage in striking slow-motion grapples. Their struggle for supremacy at the breast of the showgirl (Willard in her Kylie Minogue best) results in some statuesque poses involving gangly Davidson distorted and dripping from the thickset shoulders of Barry.

There are flashes of sympathy from the strongman, for whom the dour-faced puppet is more nuisance than threat. His murder of Petrouchka comes as an exasperated last resort, after which Spink reaches out to Fokine metaphysics and summons four phantom Petrouchkas to torment those who remain behind imprisoned by life.

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