



MARK BRUCE'S LATEST PRODUCTION REINTERPRETS ANCIENT THEMES FOR A 21ST CENTURY AUDIENCE

FIGHTING FOR LOVE

Interview Renee Yearwood
Photo Stephen Berkeley-White

Launched in 1991, the Mark Bruce Dance Company is known for its imaginative productions, taking beholders into mythical worlds with characters that are sometimes uncomfortable, unsettling. Previous pieces have included *Helen* (1996), *BlackBird/RedRose* (1998), *Skellig* (2008) and the critically acclaimed *Sea of Bones* (2007).

Love and War is the Company's current production. In this new work, Mark Bruce uses theatre-in-the-round, and a cast of dancers whose performances 'plunge the viewer into an underworld, where time shifts and figures from myth and ritual collide'. With costumes and set designs by Marian Bruce, and a soundtrack of eclectic music, *Love and War* pushes the boundaries of the viewers' imagination.

The eclectic cast of dancers includes Greig Cooke, who has performed internationally for fourteen years. Elizabeth Mischler, a graduate of the prestigious Juilliard School, has danced in productions at the Royal Opera House and as a soloist with the Ballet Theatre Munich between 1998 and 2003, and Eleanor Duval, a dance teacher who has performed in various productions at Glyndebourne Opera and the Royal Albert Hall. Darren Ellis, Ino Riga, Caroline Hotchkiss and Joanne Fong complete the cast for the production of *Love and War*.

Sublime caught up with Mark Bruce to talk to him about his inspiration and preparations for the latest production.

SUBLIME: YOUR CAREER EXPERIENCE IS EXTENSIVE. WHAT WAS THE MOTIVATION FOR CREATING YOUR OWN DANCE COMPANY?

MARK BRUCE: Being able to pursue my work without the constraints of working to commissions enables me to take more risks and push myself into unexplored territory. If it goes wrong, I'm the only one who is responsible. Also, I can choose who I work with.

S: WHAT INSPIRES YOU WHEN SELECTING THE THEMES FOR YOUR SHOWS, SPECIFICALLY FOR *LOVE AND WAR*?

MB: Anything true inspires me. The difficulty with *Love and War* has been the amount of references relative to such an archetypal subject.

One of the hardest things has been the editing, making decisions about what to lose and what to keep in the final work. *Love and War* has references ranging from Ancient Greek mythology to horror films, but it is also inspired by my own life, particularly the behaviour of my children, and also dreams – some would say nightmares.

S: THE MUSIC IS OBVIOUSLY A GREAT MIX OF CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS, THE WHITE STRIPES AND QUEENS OF THE STONE AGE, AMONG OTHERS. HOW PERSONAL IS THE SELECTION OF THE MUSIC FOR YOU?

MB: Choosing music is always personal. I have to respond to it, and then it has to justify its place within the work.

S: THE SET, PROPS AND COSTUMES OF *LOVE AND WAR* ARE MADE MAINLY FROM RECYCLED MATERIALS. WAS THIS A CONSCIOUS CHOICE, AND DOES THIS ADD ANOTHER DIMENSION TO THE PRODUCTION?

MB: I think we – the production team – all like working with materials that have a history. These materials are allowed to influence the final product. It's the same with the dancers – we build their characters in the work together.

S: THE DANCERS ALL HAVE VERY DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS. HOW DOES THIS DIVERSITY ULTIMATELY AFFECT THE PRODUCTION?

MB: Again, the process involves choices – the cast has so much to offer. They bring a lot to the studio before we even begin the process. There are many options, but the work has to have cohesion, a line running through it that doesn't stray so far you can't take the audience with you.

'WE ALL LIKE WORKING WITH MATERIALS THAT HAVE A HISTORY. THESE MATERIALS ARE ALLOWED TO INFLUENCE THE FINAL PRODUCT. IT'S THE SAME WITH THE DANCERS – WE BUILD THEIR CHARACTERS IN THE WORK TOGETHER'



The audience doesn't have to 'get' everything in a literal or narrative way, but should leave with a picture that makes some kind of sense. Even if they can't explain it, it should connect with something inside them. The piece is designed to stir, to evoke something inside us all that can often remain hidden, or even lost, in our everyday lives. Backgrounds can be diverse, but the themes of love and war are universal.

S: WOULD YOU SAY THAT THE RITUALISTIC NATURE OF THE REHEARSAL PROCESS ADDS TO HOW THE PERFORMANCE TRANSLATES ON STAGE?

MB: Absolutely! Making work is a ritual. It calls on something ancient in us all. The performance is full of rituals, our rituals. ■

markbrucecompany.com

Love and War by the Mark Bruce Company opens on 7 and 8 May in Bristol at the Tobacco Factory Theatre as part of Mayfest. From 3 to 5 June the production will be in London at The Place as part of the Round Season