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Emerging theatre writer/director

Review: Junk Ensemble, The Falling Song

I'm back, this time on the other side of having seen [Junk Ensemble's The Falling Song](#), at [Live at LICA](#), at the Nuffield in Lancaster. In my [preview](#), I expressed my hope that it would be rad, and I can confirm that, yes, yes it was to a good degree rad.

I'm going to restrict myself to one paragraph in which I'm allowed to gush about how enthused I was by the number of children present, both in the show itself, and in the audience. Even more encouraging was that they all seemed to be having a great time. And I had a great time too. It's probably more than a little out of self interest, but the more perpetuating of the arts we can get going through generations, the better. I really enjoyed the show, but my favourite thing about it by far was seeing the next generation enjoying theatre. Let's hope they keep at it.

Onto the show. It looked great, from the moment you went in, there was stuff to look at, and you wanted to look at it, see what they were going to do with it all. Most intriguing was the musical contraption sat at the edge of the stage, from which all manner of incidental sounds, and music issued forth. My programme informs me it is a 'Higgstrument', created and played by one [George Higgs](#), who has a website, right there. And I did enjoy the music. It came in hard, and percussive, really filled the space, and felt inseparable from the choreography, which I feel is testament both to the composition and the choreography, from Denis Clohessy, and Megan and Jessica Kennedy, respectively.

For all I liked the music, I'd have loved if all of it was live. I think a full live orchestra would have been fantastic, but obviously impractical, so I'll not push that point. That'd be asking a lot, I think.

Onto the dancing. The piece was an interesting, a combination of intense, charged sections, alternating with childish, playful, and often amusing interludes. In both, however, I was very conscious of weight, and gravity, throughout the piece; the performers were constantly leaning on each other, heaving each other around, holding each other up, offering support. There was always a human presence, keeping the dancers from hitting the ground. For all the falling, support, seemed a key element of the piece. The motifs of falling and apples evoked the fall of man, and Isaac Newton, but the piece continually shied away from this into play, into childishness. What this piece was emphatically *not* was reverent, which, considering the ideas implied by the aesthetic, intrigued me.



Image © The Falling Song

I can't criticise the children, because even if they weren't brilliant (which they were) that would hardly seem fair. They sounded great as a choir, and I was impressed by the confidence in their ability to sing unaided by adults. It would have been very easy not to so totally trust a group of primary school children, but the trust that was given to them paid off. I might have liked to see them running about the stage a little more, which they did get up to eventually, though perhaps this only happening at the end was part of the point. In many ways, by the end of the show, the piece had given way to the children.

And the presence of the children, I feel, was entirely vital to the success of the piece. Upon seeing four adult male dancers onstage, looking various parts primal, bestial, alone, supported, often intensely emotional, you'd be forgiven for expecting something very heavy-browed, very 'oh look how fallen are we'. And the children remove that entirely, by giving the piece something I mentioned right at the start: hope. Because yes, very well, we see where we are, but with the children we see where we've come from, where they are going. I mentioned the significance of weight in the piece, and the significance of being held up, supported. Yes, they fall, we fall, but you'll always stop falling. There's always support, and companionship.

Apples, of course, aren't just symbols of the fall, of gravity, of weight and science. They're fruit, they grow, they are full of seeds, full of potential. At the end of the show, the children slowly cover the stage with apples. Ultimately, this is a very optimistic piece, both in its content and in its inclusion, through its lack of reverence its accessibility. And judging from the reactions I saw and heard in the audience, and on the faces of the kids onstage, that optimism seems well placed.

The show is touring the country, dates [here](#). I recommend it. Take some kids, get them into theatre. And see some great dancing while you're at it.