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Justitia

Concept, direction and choreography by Jasmin Vardimon

Jasmin Vardimon Company

Peacock Theatre, Sadler's Wells

17–22 September 2013

Is Lady Justice, *Justitia*, on trial in Jasmin Vardimon's physical theatre dance drama with spoken text, thirty pages of spoken text?

A man is found dead in his friend Charlie's (Luke Burrough) flat. Charlie's wife Mimi stands accused—of what? Was it murder, manslaughter, self-defence? Or is there more to this than meets the eye? Was the therapist the rapist? The audience is the jury.

On a Lazy Susan carousel set, we are served the variations, the physical rewinds and replay, the freeze-frame forensic details. The courtroom, the sitting room where the deed takes place, the therapist's consulting room where the self is unpicked and confessions made, and the simulated interiors of the characters' psyches, the oddest the neighbour witness played by a man in drag (Estéban Fourmi), adding an element of David Lynchian intrigue and deception.

Merle Hensel's clever set gives considerable substance to Vardimon's Hitchcockian concept: chairs embedded up the courtroom wall serve as a climbing frame and pegs on which to hang the characters. Clichés and visual metaphors abound. Guilt is analyzed. And dark humour saves the play.

The barrister (Mafalda Deville) physically manipulates her witnesses, literally tying them in knots; the dead man therapist (Paul Blackman) is a controlling comic show creep; men are macho—not even naked breasts can distract from a TV football game; the court case is an arcade game martial arts fighting contest.

The question Vardimon professes to be asking is “does what we see dictate our point of view, or does our point of view dictate what we see”? And she throws everything at it—from Ruth Ellis, the last woman hanged in Britain in 1955 (this is a major clue) to *Street Fighter*, in which Aoi Nakamura (Mimi) is remarkable—she is remarkable throughout.

A mash-up cinematic score (Vivaldi, Purcell, Ryuichi Sakamoto, Johnny Cash, Aphex Twin, Yoko Ono, and many more—soundtrack design is by Ohad Fishof), striking images, and great performances, but *Rashomon* it is not. Nor Ayckbourn for that matter. For all its high-octane dancing, *Justitia* lacks dramatic tension.

Rebecca Lenkiewicz's hackneyed script and wordplay, mostly delivered by the barrister, typed up by the court stenographer, and projected on screen, muddies rather than clarifies.

“I type therefore I am.” *Type* becomes *typo*, becomes *erratum*, which ultimately leads to *imagine*. Would we get the drift without the words? Might be less distracting without the inconsequential details and irrelevant backstories.

A Brechtian exercise in *Verfremdungseffekt*? Perhaps. What strikes me about *Justitia*—back at the Peacock after its [2007](#) and [2009](#) showings—is that it's really about the process of a choreographer's / writer's creativity rather than about the process of law, or the shaming and questioning of justice, of prejudice.

It's about telling stories. The creator of the piece, Jasmin Vardimon, is the Dashiell Hammett figure banging out the story on a typewriter in the opening scene. And this is just another story. With off-the-peg characters, off-the-peg dynamics, and some off-the-peg moves...

Where *Justitia* does excel is in the execution of the choreography, in which I see a mix of DV8, Lea Anderson, Deborah Colker, and Ohad Naharin. Athletic, tumbling twists, corkscrew turns, humorous pratfalls, daredevil flights through the air, the seven dancers are amazing (Christine Gouzellis as the quiet stenographer Cassandra and David Lloyd the double-entendre-ing security guard complete the *dramatis personae*).

Reviewer: [Vera Liber](#)