

# British Theatre Guide

News, reviews, features and podcast on theatre across the UK

## Murmurs

Conceived and directed by Victoria Thierrée Chaplin  
Queen Elizabeth Hall, South Bank Centre  
(2011)

This is a follow up to *Aurélia's Oratorio*, the critically acclaimed show in which Aurélia took up residence in a chest of drawers to escape the outside world which has been touring since 2003. Victoria Thierrée Chaplin brings the same imagination to this new work which is advertised as suitable for ages eight and over. Titled more descriptively in French as *Murmures des Murs* and getting its British première on the South Bank, it too stars her daughter Aurélia Thierrée. Aurelia grew up acquiring the skills of her mother and her father Jean Baptiste Thierrée working in their Cirque Imaginaire and Cirque Invisible, which is evident here in the physicality of her performance without ever presenting the appearance of a conventional circus act.

Aurélia now seems to live in cardboard boxes or is she moving out—or just moving on? Are they pulling her house down—there's definitely a demolition later. She is in a city that keeps changing and looks a little like Venice. It is peopled by grey figures with fixed, drawn-on faces who could be ghosts or memories. There is a young man with whom she dances a tango. He follows her as she moves from place to place, scaling buildings, climbing through windows. There is another darkly-romantic man who always seems to be there before him, leaving sometimes as he arrives. With this man she literally dances on air. Meanwhile the grey people gather offering some unknown threat.

This is a surreal world that has the insubstantiality and metamorphoses of a dream. This dream sometimes verges on a nightmare, though the bad things are always left behind. There is enough danger to be exciting without terrifying the youngest members of the audience and plenty going on to intrigue and mystify them.

Wordless but driven by an atmospheric score, it is a performance elegantly played with great precision. There are the Thierrée Chaplin signature transformations and disappearances, often emerging when and where you least expect. It uses Aurélia's skills in folding herself into a tiny space and in controlling dummy figures she brings to life making them appear to be controlling her. The images are sometimes enigmatic. What does the white haired elderly giant represent that she conjures up from swathes of bubble wrap? Who is the heavy drinker who tries to assault her?

The painted cloths that slide across the stage and through which Aurélia may suddenly slip may flap and a version of a baroque theatre wave machine may make it obvious how some of the effects are created, but that is part of the enjoyable theatricality of the event and there are plenty of other inexplicable amazements.

There is an elegiac quality pervading these apparitions, often touched with an air of romance and illuminated by moments of playful humour. The pratfalls and knocks that are the lot of the young man who follows especially delight the youngsters in the audience and Swedish circus-acrobat Magnus Jakobsson matches these robust skills with a fuddled ardour in his pursuit of his love. As

the man who seems to have found favour with Aurélia, Puerto-Rican dancer Jaime Martinez moves with quicksilver agility and lithe attraction. Aurélia Thierrée is at the centre of this journey into her dreams but she appears among equal talents and is not the only delight in this strange creation.

*"Murmurs" plays at the Queen Elizabeth Hall until 2nd January 2012.*

**Reviewer:** [Howard Loxton](#)