

# British Theatre Guide

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## Possibilities that Disappear Before a Landscape

Tanya Beyeler and Pablo Gisbert

El Conde de Torrefiel

Baltic, Gateshead

28 April 2017

If I tell you this show is intellectually challenging while including such scenes as four naked men playing with one another's genitals, you might find it a contradiction. Which is fair enough.

The piece is full of contradictions and almost impossible to categorise.

Let's just say it's unlikely to be coming soon to a Theatre Royal near you. But it is often astonishing and the fact I find it difficult to define, or at times understand, should be put into context.

Whenever I get a whiff of pretension in theatre, I want to reach for the shotgun. In the wrong hands, this offering could seem pretentious or at least obfuscatory—no less a sin.

Yet the Spanish company's brilliant theatre skills, discipline, imagination and ability to create stunning visual effects from virtually nothing combine to make this pretty unforgettable and render the need for a literal interpretation only secondary.

The 70-minute piece is created by Tanya Beyeler (Switzerland) and Pablo Gisbert (Spain). There is no actual plot. Actors never speak—a Spanish soundtrack commentary is translated into English surtitles—and the performance is in Baltic's Space One (converted here to a black box with brilliant white floor). For the starting section, the four actors (again naked) combine their bodies into a series of poignant body sculptures to reinforce the female soundtrack about the Auschwitz memorial centre.

Each of the seven scenarios has a different European city setting (this often seems arbitrary) and the visuals unfolding on stage do not not always specifically relate directly to what we are hearing on the soundtrack, a succession of philosophical musings and possibilities from various thinkers and writers.

A terrifying Ukranian poem (sorry, poet unknown) on the nature of growing old and dying is reinforced by a man (clothed this time) sounding first softly but growing ever louder a giant J Arthur Rank-type gong. By the finale, the crescendo of percussion and poetic word power almost has us creeping under the seat.

Another scene has the four men linked like a chorus line. Between them, they are wearing two pairs of brightly coloured tights (plus briefs). The movements suggest each pair of tights is on one pair of legs, but this is not true. The criss-crossing and dancing of the legs reinforce this illusion, but, when the two red coloured tights lift into the air in unison, the appearance is of someone effortlessly levitating.

The genitals scene, which has the playfulness of [The Puppetry of The Penis](#) has each male member encased in a tight colourful plastic covering. These are tugged flicked and fondled by the others (the actors show remarkable control I might add). The audience laugh out loud at such effrontery but the laughter is tinged with nervousness. I totally forget the content of the commentary in this scene. The visuals *can* sometimes deflect from the words.

The quartet of fit-looking performers are Tirse Orive Liarte, Nicolas Carbajal Cerchi, David Mallols and Albert Perez Hidalgo. You might wonder what it all adds up to and whether all the nudity is needed. But allow yourself to become immersed in the overall experience and these things don't really matter.

This is one offering from the reborn GIFT, Gateshead International Festival of Theatre, which, over three days and under the direction of the infectiously enthusiastic Kate Craddock, offers no fewer than twenty-one performances of often radical, cutting edge performance from throughout Europe. Talks, art, dance, music, comedy, cabaret and theatre from 8AM to late night.

Gateshead is often seen as the poor relation to the more fashionable Newcastle across the Tyne; this despite the fact that in the last 20 years Gateshead's riverside has created such gems as Sage, Baltic and the Millennium Bridge, while Newcastle's offering has been merely bars and restaurants.

The highly enterprising GIFT Festival reminds us again just what Gateshead is capable of. And their football team may even soon be back in the league.

**Reviewer:** [Peter Mortimer](#)