

British Theatre Guide

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

What Remains

Words by Ben Harrison, music by David Paul Jones

Grid Iron Theatre Company

Traverse @ University of Edinburgh Medical School Anatomy Department

5–29 August 2011



For Grid Iron's latest atmospheric site-responsive show, the grand Victorian interiors of the university's anatomy department become the fictitious Conservatoire of the Anatomy of Music: an elite musical academy ruled over by fanatical maestro Gilbert Prendergast. We first watch him perform a haunting melody (an original composition by performer David Paul Jones) on a grand piano stationed among the smooth stone columns in the building's lobby. Even while he's lost in the music there is still a flicker of greedy menace in his eyes. He vanishes and becomes a disembodied presence, a voice in the air, a sense of eyes on the back of your head, for much of the rest of the show.

The audience become the "candidates" applying to the academy, and the show is most effective when engaging us in practical tests of musical ability - it's disconcerting, we don't know what the stakes are or what will happen if we fail.

The soundscape that accompanies us around the rooms is also nicely chilling, and the abandoned instruments that still seem to emit sound are a particularly good touch.

We do spend a little too much time being guided around empty rooms containing telling artefacts from the Conservatoire, and invited to inspect them as though we're in a museum tour rather than a piece of live theatre. And another issue is how early the diabolical underside of the Conservatoire becomes clear to us; and equally, how eventually unclear are Prendergast's motives for his ghastly actions.

But the company have taken the building and run with it, so to speak. When a masked figure sings to us on the stairwell and then beckons us to follow him upstairs to be confronted by the great wrought-iron gates that guard the building, it's the sort of visual clout that set designers dream of creating. The lighting at this point is suitably horror-film-reminiscent, making me think most of all of the demonically-possessed house in *Poltergeist*.

Jones' performance is extremely creepy and menacing, and we audience-members, wrong-footed and somewhat infantilised by the role we're asked to play in this story, feel genuine unease when we have to pass close to him or look him in the eye. The creators say that they want to create an experience for the audience that is like being immersed in a horror film. It's an interesting endeavour; the piece on the whole left me with chills but not nightmares.

Reviewer: [Corinne Salisbury](#)