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H

REVIEW

There can be no doubt about May B's talent

ARTISTIC perfectionists take note. There's a show in town which must be one of the most accomplished contemporary works to hit Hong Kong.

And there's more. For *May B*, a superbly crafted piece of dance theatre from acclaimed French choreographer Maguy Marin, pares life down to its most pathetic hopeless bones until you can hardly take it in. It's a disturbing experience.

The piece, inspired by the writings of Samuel Beckett, develops its mesmerising physical vocabulary from banal gestures and mannerisms, while its sound comes partly from the dancers' own moans, angry spittings and empty laughs.

The varied characters they portray are tragic - sadly inconspicuous, shabbily dressed,



by Elizabeth Street

white faces made up with sunken grey eyes like corpses. They shuffle everywhere, going nowhere fast but setting up a hum-drum little rhythm which runs through the entire performance.

The theme of waiting is also explored. As Marin explains: "When Beckett's characters yearn for stillness, they cannot help moving; be it a little or a lot, they move".

At the end, the dancers take their curtain still in character - looking like people who were

last in the queue when optimism and happiness were given out. There is not one smiling face, not one lighter step, not one twinkling eye of delight; consummate performing skill and dramatic effect.

If you're not a fan of Beckett, go anyway. Marin's mother Louise made the costumes, Schubert features in the soundtrack, and about half an hour after the performance, the feel-good factor is great.

Surely life could never be as dreary as all that. Or could it? Perhaps that's the *May B*.

May B, Compagnie Maguy Marin. Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, February 15

Kicking over the traces

YOU can judge a children's show by the noise it provokes. *The Little Left Shoe*, staged by The Anonymous Theatre, had its young audience screaming with delight and their parents roaring with laughter for over an hour.

The story is simple enough. Jo-Jo is the little left shoe (a gigantic blue trainer to be precise), who wants to become a human because he is sick of being trod on in the MTR and plastered with dirt.

Unlike his peers in the shoe cabinet, among them a pair of heavy walking boots and high heels, Jo-Jo longs to become a young boy like his owner, Ming Chai, who spends his days playing and eating chocolate ice-cream.

He, therefore, asks Chi Chi-chat (a Merlin the Magician equivalent) to grant him his wish. The terrifying, but wise, Chi obliges but warns Jo-Jo he

by Kevin Kwong

can only become a piece of footwear again if he solves three riddles.

It is at this point that Jo-Jo embarks on an exciting adventure when he meets the fluorescent ghosts residing at a rubbish tip, the vain octopus, dancing bananas and, yes, the evil and deadly dragon on Magic Island (which ate all the bananas).

The lively cast, a mixture of puppets and actors, succeeds in keeping the young audience from yawning. When the evil dragon asks the audience why he is in agony, a girl replies: "Maybe you want to visit the toilet."

But perhaps what really sustains the children's attention are the special effects which make the puppets, even though they are just giant shoes, look so alive.

Thanks to a group of visiting artists from Prague, the Eastern European art of puppetry can be seen on the Hong Kong stage as part of this year's Hong Kong Arts Festival. Watch out for the midnight ghost dance by the refuge tip; it is visually spectacular.

Both Wendy Mok, who plays Jo-Jo and Justine Woo, his faithful friend Yau-Yau (the right shoe), blend in well with the puppets.

The only time when *The Little Left Shoe* loses a bit of its magic is when children from the audience keep shouting: "I can see the hands behind the puppets".

The Little Left Shoe, The Anonymous Theatre. Sai Wan Ho Civic Centre Theatre. February 15, 6pm and 8pm. Tickets from Urbtix.

City Garden Hotel: (2837 2888): Admiral's Bar opens daily from 4pm-1am (except Fri and Sat till 2pm).

Business buffet lunch and weekday dinner buffet, noon-2:30pm and 6:30pm-9:30pm, Garden Cafe at \$82 per person and \$162 adult, \$100 child. And dinner buffet at \$172 adult, \$110 child Fri-Sun and public hols.

Conrad (2521 3838): Jazz and blues artists at the Lobby Lounge, 6:30pm-midnight except Sundays.

Italian cuisine and wine selection at Nicholini's. Open for lunch and dinner daily. French cuisine for lunch and daily at Brasserie On the Eight.

Eaton Hotel (2782 1818): Local Band with 3 singers at Planter's Bar, 6:30pm-12:15am Mon-Thurs; 6:30pm-1:15pm Fri, Sat and public hols.

"Buffet Extravaganza" theme dinner at Coffee Shop and Lobby Lounge, \$208 (\$128 child), seafood Mon-Tue; the Spirit of Japan Wed-Thurs; East meets West Fri-Sun; Kato dinner \$168; Astor Cafe.

Excelsior (2894 8888): South African Band at Dicken's Bar, 9pm-1am. Jazz sessions every Sun, 3pm-6pm. Live band The Talk of the Town, 9pm-2am every night.

New tea buffet at Garden Lounge and Coffee Shop; Fri-Sun and public hols 3-6pm. Buffet lunch at the Coffee Shop noon-2:30pm Mon-Fri, \$108 adult, \$88 child; Sat and Sun, \$138 adult, \$98 child. Buffet dinner Sun-Thur, \$208 adult, \$138 child; Fri-Sun, \$218 adult, \$148 child.

Furama Kempinski (2525 5111): String quartet at La Ronda Restaurant and Lounge, and house pianist at the Rotisserie both 7pm-11pm Mon-Sat. Opium at Lau Ling Bar 5:30pm-8pm Mon-Fri; Yin Fa 8pm until late night.

International lunch buffet at La Ronda, \$210 adult, \$165 child weekdays; \$235 adult, \$190 child weekends. Dinner \$325 adult, \$275 child daily. Buffet breakfast \$140; set 5-course lunch \$245; set dinner \$310, or a la carte, at Rotisserie.

Grand Hyatt (2588 1234): Freddie James and the Fusion 3 perform in the music room of JJ's; 9:45pm Mon-Fri, \$120 cover charge (Mon-Thurs); (till 2:50am Fri); 10:30pm-3:35am Sat; \$170 cover charge (Fri & Sat).

Mon-Fri: Lunch and dinner at One Harbour Road Cantonese