



## Liz Roche, Wrongheaded, Chapter, CDF17

November 10, 2017 by Mike Smith

There is nothing apologetic about the shocking brutality in Liz Roche's *Wrongheaded* which melds video, voice and movement to tackle the stark reality of women in the company's home of Ireland.

The video on the floor of the theatre in Cardiff's Chapter is the first exposition of the fierce and feisty spoken words of Galway poet Elaine Feeney; a fire-cracker delivery of vicious text that has emerged from the so many dark, heart breaking and sickening examples of women subjugated through their bodies commoditised, controlled and censored by the law and religious-dominated opinion.

*"The women are here to count,  
To sit together and carve out arms.  
To bury their dead, to feed their living,  
When they are done they can  
Dance in the end clutches of their spat energy,  
Bone of bone's, sharp cuckoo barrage.  
Sweet desire,  
All spent." Elaine Feeney*

The dance work has two players, although they are each give a virtual as well as corporal life through the near trance-making film from Mary Wycherley, played out to Feeney's poetry. That poetry delves into a myriad of imagery, natural, traditional and symbolic which are interpreted in the movement, feeling and atmosphere created by the live dancers with lighting designed by Sinead Wallace and music from Ray Harman.

The experience is then repeated in real-time, real life, as Sarah Cerneaux and Justine Cooper lithely and powerfully evoke physical sickness and pain along with the inner trauma, despair and hopelessness wreaked by their gender, their fertility and their condition in Irish society. There are sections of great gentleness smashed against raw pain, desperation and minuscule drops of humour.

Of course it is not pleasant video, poetry and dance work to watch but the choreography is sharp and expressive, thrashing us with the narrative and revealing the savage beauty at its heart.

Okay, so I am a bloke – so I also accept I watch as an outsider.

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WALES WHAT'S ON GUIDE

## CARDIFF DANCE FESTIVAL: WRONGHEADED / IN THIS MOMENT | STAGE REVIEW

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### Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff, Thur 9 Nov

The biannual Cardiff Dance Festival opened on the 8 November with a performance of *Wrongheaded* by the Liz Roche Company. It formed a double bill with Laila Diallo's solo piece *In This Moment* on the second evening of the festival at Chapter Arts Centre. Both pieces complemented each other beautifully, with Roche's highly visceral and kinetic collaboration forming a powerful counterpoint to Diallo's poignant and carefully observed meditation on time and the body.

*Wrongheaded* explores the impact of institutional, political and economic forces upon the female body, specifically in the context of Irish identity and history. Roche's choreography combines with a highly evocative soundscape and poem by Elaine Feeny and film by Mary Wycherley to create a triptych of sound, image and movement. Starting with the ghostly overhead projection of video onto the floor, two female dancers begin a slow unfurling of their bodies, interacting with the images from the video which takes us into a cave, where the dancers dressed in lace dresses are frantically clawing at the stone face, struggling for breath and moving in a jerking, halting fashion as if being hit by volts of electricity.

The video and choreography begin to mirror each other as the dancers' movement in the space is reflected by their appearance in the video. The fluid, dynamic choreography, skilfully performed by Sarah Cerneaux and Justine Cooper, utilises the whole of the space, sliding down walls and forcefully pushing against each other, the floor and the spaces between the dancers. As the piece progresses so the shape and meanings change; the video projection ceases and the work becomes this entwined response to the sound and voices articulating the experience of being a women in Ireland. I caught the occasional phrase from the voiceover, "the children must not be marked", "gouge up the concrete", "the women are here to count, to sit together and carve out arms", adding to the haunting, disembodied effect. It's reminiscent of a Samuel Beckett play, helped by Stephan Dodd's lighting design from the front and side to create a strong chiaroscuro effect of shadows and light. Sometimes frantic,

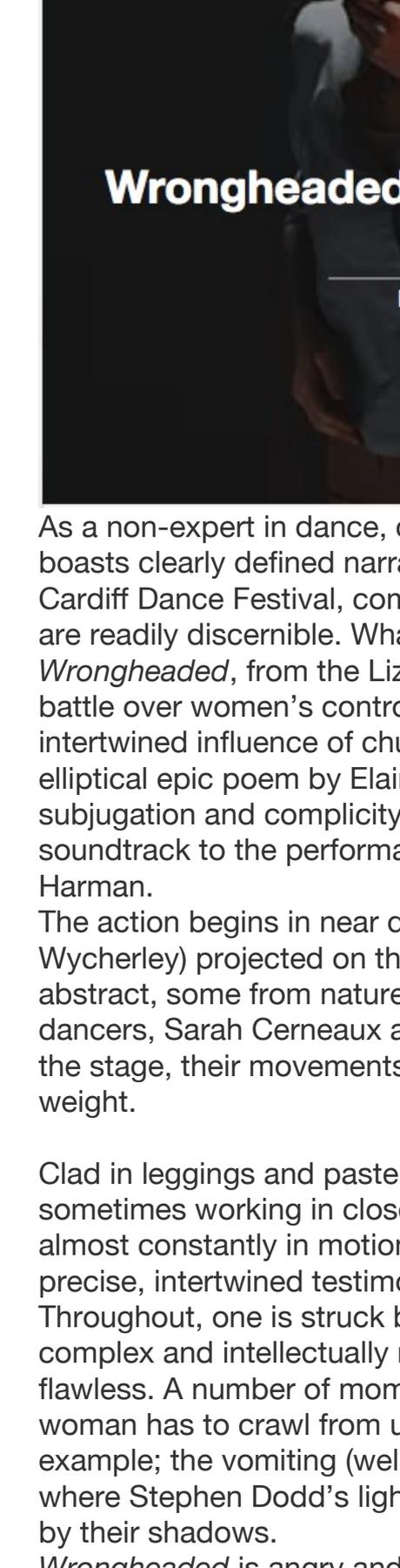
always intense and primeval (the retching, the dead weight of bodies lying on each other), *Wrongheaded* is a tremendous immersion into the experience of shared, bonded womanhood that offers a glimmer of hope and the possibility of genuine political and social change.

In contrast, Laila Diallo's pared down solo piece, devised with Jules Maxwell, sees a simple chair placed in the middle of the space. Diallo enters and sits in the chair whilst a voiceover about time – how we divide up our days, how time has had different meanings and interpretations – plays out. As she begins to tape out the floor, in sections resembling a sundial or clock, the sense of time unfolding in different stages becomes resonant, with Diallo emphasising that 'we don't move through time, time moves through us'. As Diallo begins to move around the space, firstly running around the marked-out tape, then using headphones to dance to music only she can hear whilst Mozart's Requiem Lacrimosa fills the theatre auditorium, we become acutely aware of how time and memory is a construct of our history, values and culture. Diallo's mesmeric performance is punctuated by moments of darkness, silence and an exquisite piano score by Maxwell.

Both dance pieces resonate with a sense of presence and immediacy, of being in the here and now and experiencing something sublime but also connected to history, the past and how we can rethink our relationship to the world.

words **ALEX WREN**

photo **EWA FIGASZEWSKA**



# Wrongheaded, In This Moment, Cardiff Dance Festival

November 10, 2017 by Othniel Smith

As a non-expert in dance, one is always grateful when presented with work which boasts clearly defined narratives or objectives. This double-bill, presented at Cardiff Dance Festival, comprises two contrasting thirty-minute pieces whose aims are readily discernible. What is presented, however, is far from simplistic.

*Wrongheaded*, from the Liz Roche Company, takes as its subject the political battle over women's control over their bodies, with particular reference to the intertwined influence of church and state in Ireland. It is based on a surreal, elliptical epic poem by Elaine Feeney, which comments on centuries of subjugation and complicity in subjugation. Her dramatic reading of it forms the soundtrack to the performance, alongside a subtle electronic score by Ray Harman.

The action begins in near darkness, with video images (courtesy of Mary Wycherley) projected on the floor of the performance area. Some of these seem abstract, some from nature, and some are of the performers themselves. The two dancers, Sarah Cerneaux and Justine Cooper, begin the piece in different areas of the stage, their movements laboured, seeming to operate under some unseen weight.

Clad in leggings and pastel-coloured blouses, they soon come together as a duet, sometimes working in close contact, sometimes interacting at a distance, but almost constantly in motion, reflecting the feverish tone of the poem if not its precise, intertwined testimonies and observations.

Throughout, one is struck by the feat of memory involved in performing such a complex and intellectually rigorous piece; let alone the dancing itself, which seems flawless. A number of moments stick in the memory: the point at which one woman has to crawl from underneath the apparently lifeless body of another, for example; the vomiting (well, nearly); the section, near the conclusion of the piece, where Stephen Dodd's lighting design sees the dancers dramatically augmented by their shadows.

*Wrongheaded* is angry and sad, but somehow hopeful, in its depiction of strength and solidarity.



**HOPE HUNT/WRONGHEADED ★★★★★**



***Project Arts Centre, Cube***



Oona Doherty's hopeful hunt is for the redemption of the white disadvantaged male. Her initial portrayal – outside and inside the theatre – is underpinned by latent aggression: brutal and flailing physicality is matched by hard consonants, spat out or hacked up in verbal loops of laddish catchphrases. But vulnerability is always below the surface: offence is defence. Eventually white replaces black costume, urban beats dissolve to sacred choral music and the movement is slowed and softened, and the deconstruction and redemption are complete.

In *Wrongheaded*, Liz Roche uses the Eighth Amendment debate to interrogate broader insidious effects of patriarchy. Still rooted in the individual woman versus the male-dominated state, her artistic touchstone – a commissioned poem by Elaine Feeney – draws physical responses that are immediate as gesture mirrored word. More persuasive are the movement's overall matching of the tone of desperation and repression, also succinctly captured in Mary Wycherly's projected film.

– *Ends September 16th*

**Michael Seaver**

## Tiger Dublin Fringe 2016: Double Bill: Wrongheaded/Hope Hunt

September 13, 2016 by Chris O'Rourke

|| 1/2



Photo credits: Luca Truffarelli

★★★★

**A powerful *Double Bill* plays with frames**

The ArtsReview

A howl of a different kind emerges in 'Wrongheaded.' A collaborative effort between poet Elaine Feeney, choreographer Liz Roche and film maker Mary Wycherley, the howl in question being Ginsberg's 'Howl,' with the whole feeling like a performance piece built around an act of spoken word protest. A protest not solely directed towards Repealing The 8th, but built from the pain and frustration of women's experience around the choices available to them around their bodies. 'Wrongheaded's' energy doesn't arise from the synergy between all three collaborative pieces, but in the dichotomy that exists between text, dance and image. If text defines repression and the image seeks release, dance struggles with the embodiment of both in an effort to find escape and expression which, under Roche's masterful gaze, is something to behold.

In 'Wrongheaded,' Roche is also experimenting with form. Split into two distinct sections, 'Wrongheaded's' opening sequence sees a frame within a frame as the image of the dancers is projected onto a screen onstage, with the words of Feeney's poem spilling from the loudspeakers, read to incredible effect by Feeney herself. But it's a slow start, taking a while to gather momentum, being neither dance, nor dance in film. With continuity in performance on screen being constantly interrupted by shifting camera angles and images of ice and rocks and exits to caves, Wycherley's art house cinematography opens up interpretative possibilities beyond the words and dance alone. Yet the cumulative effect is to enforce levels of distance and abstraction, as if what's being seen and heard belongs primarily in the head and not the body.

In contrast, during the second section, as the images disappear and dancers Sarah Cerneaux and Justine Cooper take to the stage, there's an urgency, immediacy and power to 'Wrongheaded' that catches your breath. The words are the same, the movements are the same, but with the cinematic frame removed, there's a raw, visceral almost primal force in play. Throughout, often conjoined like Siamese twins, Cerneaux and Cooper wrestle and wind across the stage space, trapped, held down, restrained by gentle bonds or repelled in a constant battle for release and survival. Executing short, often snappy series of movements, both dancers are often gripped or overwhelmed by spasms, as if suffocating or drowning in breath and movement to the point of exhaustion, craving release in a truly exhilarating performance.

In addressing the forces behind the modern young male and those which trap, condemn and limit the choices of women, both works attempt to articulate a powerful experience beyond the realm of words. Indeed, both, with every respect to Feeney's excellent piece, understand the limits of words, but also their importance in articulating experience. Both 'Wrongheaded' and 'Hope Hunt' share a wild frenetic energy, a visceral physicality, sharp sequences of sound and movement that push their respective performers to the point of exhaustion in an attempt to convey something of those experiences to their audiences. And this they do, with 'Wrongheaded' and 'Hope Hunt' digging beneath the sounds and movement to find that living impulse of rage, fear, frustration and defiance with a rawness and a vulnerability that is almost palpable. Not to be missed.

In Liz Roche's *Wrongheaded*, there are two dancers, but three voices at play: Elaine Feeney's poetry, Liz Roche's choreography and Mary Wycherley's abstract film. The text and movement are performed twice; once on video and once onstage, Feeney's poem gaining substance the second time around. Wycherley's film has great symbolic power, especially her image of the rocks placed in ice, signifying something taking hold, a running out of time. Cinematography, editing and costume are all notably strong. Feeney's poem conjures imagery and emotion quickly and without mercy. The text features veiled references to literary and historical examples of female oppression, linking them to our own time, including Shakespeare's Ophelia and the exiled women of institutions like the Magdalene Laundries. *Wrongheaded* focuses on a lack of choice and agency over one's body – in every scenario, every act, the woman herself is the least important concern:

"There's a ring of sinewy stuff stuck in the middle of me. Twisted tight, like rock, they're going to take a hairy skin hammer to it and open the middle of me. No, they haven't asked me. It's not mine."

*Wrongheaded* tackles every possible aspect of oppression in abstraction, never outright saying what it means. The piece is helped by this vagueness and quickness. Topics of abortion, rape and suicide are dealt with without ever saying the words. In general, Feeney's poetry holds up better than the choreography, which is expressive and vital, but somewhat needlessly repetitive. Dancers Sarah Cerneaux and Justine Cooper work extremely hard, their chemistry pointing us to a solution in female solidarity.

This double-bill is certainly a highlight of the Fringe. An intense, political, but accessible hour of theatre, *Wrongheaded/Hope Hunt* demonstrates how to build a vast emotional world in the minds of the audience through the power of suggestion alone.

**Runs until 16 September as part of the Tiger Dublin Fringe Festival | Image: Luca Trufferelli.**

Review Overview

**The Reviews Hub Score: 4\* Intense**

## Fringe 2016: Double Bill: Wrongheaded / Hope Hunt

meg on September 17, 2016 / 0 comments



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[Wrongheaded](#)

This piece from [Liz Roche Company](#) speaks on the nature of woman and their bodies and the call to repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> amendment. The film at the start is gritty and unsettling, however once the dancers come in you can see up close the precision of their movements and how each move has its own exact meaning.

The piece manages to intertwine spoken word and dance so beautifully, it automatically evokes a response from the audience. The movement is often repetitive and slow, but imaginative, creative and provocative. Spoken word poet Elaine Feehily gives character and presence to the unknown, allowing the dancers to use their body movements to further highlight what she is trying to express. *Wrongheaded* is a real combination of spoken word film and dance. It is a piece that purely evokes through the word through dance, highlighting the beauty of language through movement.