



Flimsy fare from a fallen man

Is Michael Clark saying that creativity is as pointless as masturbation, asks Ismene Brown

By Ismene Brown

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"BEFORE" and "After" are dreadful words. Before Michael Clark did his head in with heroin, he was a unique new presence in dance, a blissfully beautiful ballet boy with a wild, up-to-date imagination. Clark's ballet exploded out of his head when he was still in his teens - it came looking quite unlike anything that anybody else was doing, tottering in silver platform boots, with buttock-exposing leotards and bare breasts, trippy sets and pulverisingly loud rock music.

He succumbed to despair in his early thirties, but in 1998 made an austere, yet hopeful comeback with current/SEE. Now he has drawn two eras of his life together, in a retrospective work, *Before and After: The Fall*. This is a pun on various falls - the personal one, the creative one, and the sledgehammer music of The Fall, which drives much of the show. The first section is called *Fall*, and revisits some of his kaleidoscopic teenage material. The second is *Rise*, the new part that he's done with the contemporary artist Sarah Lucas.

I'm presuming *Fall* recycles the early pieces to search through their exhibitionist postures for clues to the mental apocalypse that he later suffered. From here, these nutty Leigh Bowery costumes and plastic trees with vast fried eggs on them by Trojan look sweetly juvenile, rather than surreally menacing. The five women of Clark's company bare their wobbly parts with panache, and cope with the risks of ballet-dancing in eight-inch platform boots, but they look rather like a dance-school end-of-year show. Clark, in a sober grey suit, acts out a brief scene of incapacity, but one imagines the second act may show him moving on, having exposed the

inconsequentiality of the demons.

Instead, Rise is pretty flat. Any rising concerns Clark's member - masturbation is its theme. After a prologue of the women prowling in their undies in the dark, we have film of Clark masturbating. The girls now dance about uninterestingly, holding plaster models of hands cupped in the correct grip. Occasionally the real Clark scurries through with his underpants around his knees. Finally, a gigantic hydraulic masturbating hand is wheeled on (it must have cost a fortune), and achieves two or three down-ups to the twangs of Zorba's Dance, before everything stops inconclusively.

Is Clark saying that creativity is as pointless as masturbation? Or that expectations of him have become so unendurable that he'll just chuck the most basic material at us and see if we swallow it? Is Lucas the one having a girl's joke about male wanking here? I believe in Clark's talent, but this is a thin little piece in an unhappily flimsy evening.

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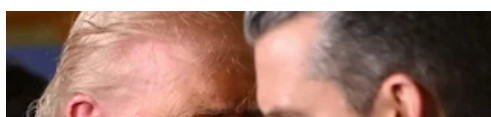
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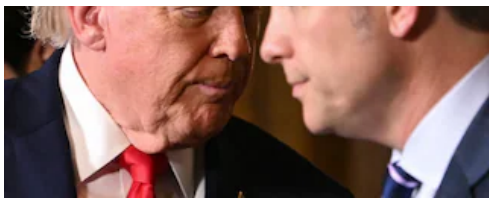
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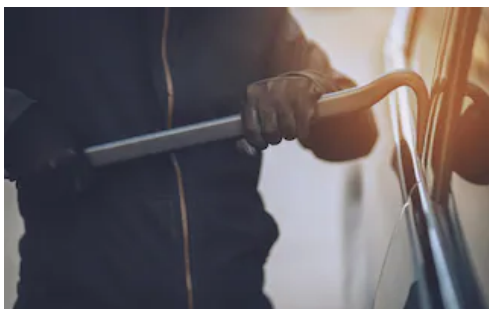
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