
Pain

The Arches, Glasgow

Joseph Farrell

THE opening image, projected on a gauze screen separating the audience from the performing area, is of a body suspended from a chain, twisting, turning, gyrating in mid-air, not according to some prearranged harmony but out of control. The image is by any standard gripping and electrifying.

On its own, it could be representative of much of the multimedia theatre Angus Farquhar and NVA have mounted over the years – visually powerful, theatrically telling but intellectually evasive. In a context which is quickly and deftly clarified, this image becomes a troubling, disquieting metaphor for a body following a logic, or non-logic, all of its own, beyond the grasp and command of the person who inhabits it.

The pain of the title is no metaphysical *angst* or existential disturbance of the spirit, but a searing, constant physical suffering, and the story consists of elements of the autobiography of the performer, Graham Cunningham. One of the graffiti flashed on to a screen carries the news that he suffers from “chronic rheumatoid arthritis”, and has done so all his life.

In these circumstances, most people would curse their fortune. but this is a defiantly upbeat tale of rebellion against the odds, of the determination of one individual to take charge of himself. The switching images on the screens, the rock music echoing the sounds produced by Cunningham in his career as a drummer, provide perfect counterpoint to a poetic text which expresses memorably the gritty willfulness of a man who would not be victim.