

KNOTS by CoisCéim Dance TheatreNuffield Theatre, Southampton, November 10

Warning: Knots is definitely not a show for a first date. Any points you score for your edgy tastes will be negated by the sight of you squirming in your seat as the company enact the more torturous aspects of romantic entanglements in bone-crunching, head-screwing detail. Cheery it ain't.

But magnetic viewing it is. CoisCéim's dance (Or is it drama? Or is it poetry?) interpretation of R D Laing's writings on the emotional catch-22s of human relationships is fast-paced and electric. Its mixture of thumping, contortive choreography is inspired by - and served up alongside - a selection of the 'knots' of Laing's book.

In an opening procession, three brides struggle onto the stage in silk meringues. As they emerge we see the difficulty. Each is dragging her groom, seated cross-legged on the train of her dress, oblivious to the extra effort his dependency is causing. By way of explanation, the cast tells us "Jack frightens Jill he will leave her because he is frightened she will leave him." Glad we got that cleared up, then.

Yet despite the complexity, Knots is distinctive in its coherence. Ex- DV8 performer Liam Steel's choreography injects humour and pathos into the text – which is lifted from Laing's study of psychotic ramblings – to create something that the audience can relate to on an instinctive level. Watching the ensemble repeat a rapid-fire sequence of advanced yoga positions to the chant "It's me. It's mine. It's not me. It's not mine," is as emotionally wrenching as the moment in which Eddie Kay's character, asked for proof of his love, slices open his shirt, wrestles out his own heart and offers it to his partner in a blood-smear'd gyration.

This is typical of the way in which Knots careers between diverse presentational styles and experiences: Emma O’Kane’s account of her character’s rape as a student is juxtaposed with Geir Hytton being questioned about his sexuality in a gay bar in the longest, most inventive list of slang for ‘gay man’ that you’re ever likely to hear. Someone must have been googling for days.

But a strong cast ensures that for all its breadth of coverage, Knots does not unravel at the seams. The performers are aided greatly by Ferdia Murphy’s imposing but ingenious set – comprised of six folding perspex cubicles, hospital-style wheeled beds, retro drop mics and fluorescent tubes – that has the uncomfortable feel of something that’s more familiar than it should be. Fitting, really, for a show that will probably convince you that a second date is not such a good idea after all.

***Knots* is on a UK tour. For dates, see [www.coisceim.com/knots\\_tours\\_uk](http://www.coisceim.com/knots_tours_uk)**

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