

REVIEWS • Dance • Theatre

Hanging Man

Reviewed by Lisa Jo Sagolla

Presented by and at The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St., NYC, March 3-6.

The human body hanging upside-down looks startlingly unfamiliar. There's a weird-shaped protrusion near the bottom that we eventually recognize as a rib cage. There are lots of long bones intersecting at varying angles, and no face, just lips and part of a nose. Instead of eyes that offer clues to the inner being, the observer's focal point is the pelvis, which is surprisingly uninteresting, aesthetically, and opens no windows to the soul. A distorted sense of gravity emerges that simultaneously disorients and intrigues, forcing viewers to re-conceive simple *demi-pliés* as difficult, upward-moving, pulling actions.

The importance of the U.S. premiere of "Hanging Man," an acrobatic dance choreographed by esteemed Czech mime artist **Ctibor Turba**, is its dramatic alteration of our perception of bodies in motion. In 11 brief movement episodes, four hanging performers develop a new expressive kinesthetic language that uses weight, activity, shape, contact, and rhythm in thoroughly novel fashions.

Suspended from the ceiling of The Kitchen by ropes and pulleys attached to their ankles or skateblades, the bodies become "human" to our eyes only when their odd, jerking movements grow agitated and we sense feelings of fright or frustration. Despite the confusing visual images confronting us, we

relate intuitively to the emotions spewing out of these unrecognizable beings.

Turba's piece explores many facets of the psyche through lonely solos, flirtatious and competitive duets, and an agonizing trio with bodies, hung in close proximity, flopping, spinning, twitching, shaking, grabbing, and knocking against each other with disconcerting force.

Emotionally driven, Turba's choreography is not inspired by a formalistic aesthetic. One can imagine the ravishing swinging shapes Turba might have sculpted with his strong, dynamic dancers. But rather, he opts for a stunningly truthful suggestion of how humans would maneuver if our physical reality somehow became inverted.



Halka Tresnakova (woman hanging) and Ondrej Lipovsky (man standing) in "The Hanging Man."

Daniela Hornickova