

Aurélia's Oratorio
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The hypnotic beauty of illusion



Theatre
Charles
Spencer

Aurélia's Oratorio

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THE last time I saw Aurélia Thierrée, she was scuttling round the stage with only her legs protruding from a suitcase.

She was a child then, appearing in her parent's delightful small-scale circus, *Le Cirque imaginaire*, which starred her mother Victoria, the graceful, acrobatic daughter of Charlie Chaplin, and her father, Jean-Baptiste Thierrée, a bumbling, sweetly smiling clown who worked with live rabbits and an endearing quacking duck.

Now the child has become a beautiful woman, with the comic grace of her grandfather and the gamine looks of a young Charlotte Rampling, and is starring in a show directed and created by her mother. It is an absolute spellbinder.

Aurélia's Oratorio one is confronted by the unexpected, the strange and the beautiful. It is like an enchanting dream, and like most vivid reveries, it momentarily colours the way you see the waking world.

Take the opening *coup de théâtre*. A chest of drawers appears on a stage dominated by rich, red velvet theatre curtains. Slowly one of the drawers opens and a hand appears. Another drawer silently slides open, and

there's a foot. Eventually, all four limbs, not to mention Aurélia's head and shoulders, are popping out of drawers in the most unexpected places. Can she really twist her body into such improbable shapes, one wonders? Well, yes and no. At the end of the act at least a few of the tricks of her craft are teasingly revealed.

This is a show that defies conventional logic, yet creates another of its own, a seamless spectacle of transformations and visual puns. Aided by another

performer and dancer, Timothy Harling, we watch an empty coat coming to life and beating up the person who is trying to put it on, or Aurélia flying a kite, except the kite appears to be flying her as she floats in the air above it.

In a scene that is poignant as well as beautiful, we see Aurélia transforming herself into a human egg-timer, her head and arms slowly disappearing into a golden dress, with sand running out at the bottom, an elegant image of transience and mortality. And in a breathtaking

final coup, a model railway is brought onto the stage, and the locomotive and carriages seem to travel right through her tummy as if through a tunnel.

Inanimate objects constantly take on a life of their own – and the artists seem as at ease in the air as on the earth, as happy to walk on their hands as their feet.

Barely a word is spoken during this hypnotic 70-minute show, accompanied by a score of haunting ambient music, and there is hardly a dull moment or

botched effect in Victoria Thierrée Chaplin's endlessly inventive production.

But what makes the evening doubly special is the captivating stage presence of her daughter – at once ethereal and sensual, solemn and mischievous, profound and absurd.

Man or woman, boy or girl, you cannot fail to fall in love with both Aurélia and this ravishing show.

Until April 16, then touring to Oxford, Brighton and Malvern. Tickets 08700 500511; tour info: 0131 228 1404