

THE SCOTSMAN

Music review: Kathryn Joseph, Tramway, Glasgow



Kathryn Joseph held the audience rapt with a skeletal suite of heartbreak and hope. Picture: John Devlin

By
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Published: 06:00
Saturday 15 September 2018

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Music and theatre have long been happy creative bedfellows, with each medium feeding off the other's particular energy. We've grown as accustomed to seeing bands on stage rocking out as part of the dramatic action as to watching musicians create touring theatrical spectacles.

Kathryn Joseph, Tramway, Glasgow ****

The partnering of spectral songwriter Kathryn Joseph with Glasgow's music/theatre crossover specialists Cryptic is an inspired marriage, spawning this intense, intimate, immaculately stylised presentation of Joseph's new album *From When I Wake the Want Is* directed by Josh Armstrong and performed by Joseph from start to finish.

Joseph makes music to lean in to anyway but from the outset the standing audience were craning their necks to fathom what was involved in James Johnson's striking hall of mirrors stage set, a beautifully conceived attraction in its own right, with vertical strips surrounding Joseph's fabulous upright piano organ and a couple of quirky black candelabra made from the limbs of anglepoise lamps.

Joseph, stately in a pink and yellow dress created by body architect Marketa Kratochvilova, normally eyeballs her audience intently as she performs but she began the show facing away into one of the mirrors, fixing her stare by reflection.

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Joseph often describes herself as a crazy witch but there is nothing malevolent about the spell she casts with her mesmeric music. For the next hour, she held the audience rapt with a skeletal suite of heartbreak and hope, only occasionally breaking the reverie by rising from her piano stool to sip from a wine glass slotted into one of the spidery sculptures.

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Her quavery, vulnerable voice came close to grief-stricken ululation on Tell My Lover, masking a darker, obsessive message about hanging on to a relationship like a possession.

She moved from fragile, circular patterns on the piano to delicate legato notes and onwards into the satisfying lament We Have Been Loved By Our Mothers before ending on a sweet heartfelt tribute to her daughter and her partner.

Joseph's child woman tones are often compared to Kate Bush and, though she cannot match her songwriting genius, this exquisite piece came over like a solo chamber version of Bush's 2014 London residency, doused in Nich Smith's monochromatic lighting design of deep warm blues, violets and pinks which complemented the meticulously pitched arc of the music.

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