

THE HERALD

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Edinburgh International Children's Festival reviews: *Evil*, Lyra Theatre; *Falling Dreams*, Traverse; *Narrow*, Traverse; *Into the Water*

By Mary Brennan, dance critic



Evil, Lyra Theatre ★★★★★

Falling Dreams, Traverse ★★★★★

Narrow, Traverse ★★★★★

Into the Water, North Edinburgh Arts ★★★

THE LONE man on-stage is unnervingly calm, humorous even, as he describes acts of sadistic brutality that can only be tagged as unmitigated evil. The savage beatings being detailed – canings from an abusive father at home, full-on physical violence from the all-powerful prefects at boarding – are based on an autobiographical novel by Jan Guillou. If you were reading the text, you could close your eyes to the frenetic blows, crunching bones and blood spatter, but Claus Bang's superbly nuanced delivery of *Evil* compels you to listen, be sucked into the dilemmas that engulf the teenaged Erik as he battles to find his own strengths and moral compass in the face of violence. This production for 12 audiences, by Folketeatret (Denmark), gets right under the skin of issues that we all know confront today's teenagers. That Bang, lead actor of the Palme d'Or winning film *The Square*, came directly from Cannes to Craigmillar to perform it is inspiring as well.

If any White Rabbits are waiting in the wings of Falling Dreams, they're more courtesy of Grace Slick than Lewis Carroll. This curious, questing Alice is no 19th century child but a modern twelve year old on the cusp of adolescence. So when she topples into the whirling vortex, devised by Het Filial Theatermakers (Netherlands) and aimed at 10 to 15 year olds, what's she really experiencing – and what we're witnessing – are the mood swings and shifting perceptions that kick in alongside her sudden hormonal meltdown. Our giddy Alice-in-freefall keeps saying that there's a storm inside her, and oh how that sense of upheaval is brought into play through some remarkable live video work, sleight-of-hand stage-craft, music and unstinting performances. **A hugely inventive, sophisticated concept is presented with a deceptive ease, wit, and a fine understanding of how puberty can feel like an out-of-control rollercoaster.**

Can you ever get too close to the one you love? Narrow (by Belgian company Laika) puts the notion to the test by squeezing a young couple into a home so small there's no room to stand up let alone lie down. Limbs and feelings get tangled up in hilariously awkward combinations, much to the glee of young audiences (6-12 years) who loved the quirks of the set as much as the acrobatic antics of the performers as they negotiate the business of togetherness.

There's no doubt about it – Suzanne Cleary and Peter Harding of Up and Over It (from Wales) have got rhythm. Clapping games become clever percussive syncopations and footwork kicks up a storm, especially when they go into their Irish dance. Where Into the Water (for ages 5 to 12) loses its focus – and perhaps the audience's interest – is in terms of the plot: the episodic structure doesn't clarify who this two-some are, why they've fetched up on a bizarre shoreline littered with junk, or what all the fine visual effects represent, beyond eye-catching moments when not much else is happening.