

ramsayburt



CONTEMPORARY DANCE

Unison – Cecilia Lisa Eliceche, Lillian Baylis
Theatre, 6th May 2016.

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For some reason I was expecting *Unison* to be a dry, formal exploration of different kinds of unison material, and found it much more fun than I had thought it would be. I should declare an interest: I taught Cecilia briefly at P.A.R.T.S. in Brussels in 2008.



(<http://mdtsthlm.se/files/images/unison-18-joeri-thiry-stuk.jpg>)

[Unison Photo: Joeri Thiry /STUK]

The reason why I'd been expecting her piece to be serious is because that's what it looks like in photographs and in some of the video extracts from it on Cecilia's vimeo channel (<https://vimeo.com/user5348652>). And also because I'd found a substantive essay by Rudi Laermans (<http://www.e-tcetera.be/unison-cecilia-lisa-eliceche>) about it. Laermans draws on Jean-Luc Nancy's discussion of the unworked community (*la communauté désoeuvré*) to discuss the philosophical implications of being in unison, and of having things in common. Having seen the way the four dancers perform the same sections of material together as a group or ensemble, I can see that Laermans has found the underlying meaning of the piece. It is about non-hierarchical sharing.

A short version of Laermans' essay is included in the programme together with quotes from Judith Butler, Chantal Mouffe, Donna Haraway, and others. Cecilia also includes her diagrammatic score of the order of different sections making up the piece.



(http://c2.staticflickr.com/8/7077/26818191106_886deddf44_c.jpg)

[Cecilia Lisa Eliceche in *Unison* © Foteini Christofilopoulou]

There is a lot of repetition, particularly in prolonged sections where the dancers execute the same cluster of movement phrases together, using them to weave through one another and make complicated, spatial patterns. The last part of the final phrase generally concludes with some of the dancers turning on the ball of their foot through more than 360 degrees so that the new sequence

can begin on a different orientation. They are all beautiful dancers and, because of the staging, it was a joy to see them close up, working full out, and enjoying their ability to perform with neat clarity but, at the same time, with such infectious energy.



(http://cvj1llwqcyay0evy.zippykid.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/fc-unison-eliceche-santkin-helland-bauwel-arms-spaced_1000.jpg)

[Cecilia Lisa Eliceche, Manon Santkin, Michael Helland and Eveline Van Bauwel in *Unison*
© Foteini Christofilopoulou]

The staging was in the round, so the seats were set out along each of the four sides of the performance space, and the studio theatre's raked seating was not used, or at least not for sitting in. At one stage the movement material that dancers were executing, which involved a lot of physical contact and climbing over one another, spilled out briefly, almost organically onto the edge and up the side of the raked seating.



(<http://sadlerswells-asset->

[s.s3.amazonaws.com/assets/Image/2486.jpg](https://s3.amazonaws.com/assets/Image/2486.jpg))

[Unison. Photo from Sadlers Wells website]

No doubt each performance is slightly different. This is a popular piece that is being performed a lot around Europe and there are a pool of dancers that Cecilia draws on to dance with her in it. This group smiled a lot in a genuine way and seemed to be really enjoying themselves and had an irrepressible, almost mischievous energy. And, of course, Rudi Laermans is right: the piece is all about relating together as a group. Being relaxed enough to enjoy being together is a statement in itself. I'd like to put a slightly political spin on this.

The economist and journalist Will Hutton, writing in *The Observer* (<http://www.theguardian.com/global/commentisfree/2016/may/07/mental-health-policy-anxiety-natasha-devon-young-people>) last Sunday, commented on the way neo-liberal politics and economics is producing widespread anxiety, particularly among young people:

For a generation the doctrine has been that the quest for a common good – in schools, in unions, in the delivery of public services – should be trumped by the expression of choice. The result is the anxiety epidemic.

He goes on:

For happiness can never result from the exercise of choice alone: we are social beings, and the building blocks of happiness lie in looking out for each other, acting together, being in teams and pursuing common goals for the common good.

So what I found myself valuing in *Unison* was the way it presented a close team working together for the common good in ways that resist the damaging effects of neo-liberal individualism. What I found so affecting was the persistence of an irrepressible collective happiness in the sheer physical pleasure of dancing so beautifully together.