



Tilly Branson went to see The Last Supper by Reckless Sleepers Left Lion

One of the clever things about the programming of the NEAT11 festival is bringing in big hitters from Europe and placing them alongside some of Nottingham's finest home grown talent. While it's exciting and refreshing to see performances like Woyzeck and Faust taking place on Nottingham stages, companies like Reckless Sleepers and Gob Squad are rightfully garnering just as much attention with inventive performances like The Last Supper, leaving no doubt as to the creative talent bubbling away in the city. On arriving at Nottingham Contemporary for the Reckless Sleepers performance, guests are greeted by a trio of barefoot waiters and guided to a seat selected at random according to a number picked out of a wine cooler at the entrance. The simplistic set made up of an eclectic collection of chairs and four long tables - three for the audience members and one for the performers - arranged around a suspended chandelier, was lit beautifully and seemed perfectly designed for the cool and bare concrete space at Nottingham Contemporary. The premise of The Last Supper is simple. The performers recite the names of deceased people, a thoughtful blend of real and fictional, famous and unfamiliar characters and give brief descriptions of their deaths, revealing their last words and final meals. For a show that focused solely on death and endings it was, thankfully, devoid of mushy sentimentality. The meals are spoken out loud and the words (written on rice paper) are eaten. There is something both fascinating and moving about this minimalist formula. Most of us are familiar with the final moments of Princess Diana's life, but how many knew what she ate that evening at the Ritz before leaving on her fateful journey? Or that Marie Antoinette's last utterance before her execution was an apology for standing on her executioner's foot? Later, as the performers imagine the last exclamations of those killed by the Hiroshima bomb, we are reminded of the vast numbers who died, as sheet after sheet of rice paper is chewed and swallowed with increasing difficulty. Also moving are the last meals of twelve executed prisoners, interspersed between the other characters, and served up for real (cloche reveals and all) to twelve members of the audience, according to the numbers chosen on the way into the space, which are placed on the tables in front of each diner. As each prisoner number is read out and the actors and audience look around to see who will be next to be served, there is a clever reminder that none of us know when our number will be up. Disappointingly, the afternoon audience resisted the urge to tuck into the food placed in front of them, but its presence added a multi-sensory element to the performance, varying according to where you were sitting. If you were lucky you might be tempted by the smell of hotdogs, burgers and beans; those less fortunate were nauseated by the odour of liver and onions. There were many moments of dark humour too. The idea that someone facing imminent death would still be concerned that the salad in their last meal be washed, Humphrey Bogart's deathbed announcement that he wished he had never switched from Scotch to Martinis, and the simple but effective sight gag of a silver cloche being removed to reveal nothing: "no last meal requested". The religious imagery suggested by the show's title is certainly present - thirteen at each table, drinking red wine - and the last words of Jesus are featured but not dwelled upon. This is not a play asking questions about what happens to people after they die, but rather holding a light up to reveal the final moments before the end. It's a clever recipe combining just the right amounts of humour and poignancy. As with all the top tables, seats are limited and booking is highly recommended. The Last Supper was performed at the Nottingham Contemporary on Saturday 4th and Sunday 5th June 2011 as part of the NEAT11 festival.