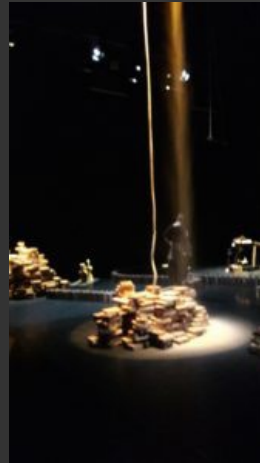


'Otus', by Company Oliveira & Bachtler

by Katharine
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Entering the darkened studio space, laid with a carefully picked out domino path of bare wooden blocks, a tilted table, and piles of wooden tiles, my eye is caught by sand trickling from the sky in a single persistent column made of movement and the spaces between. It's as restful to watch as it is absorbing, and sets the tone for the 50 minutes ahead of us as it disappears into sawdust and the blocks below. This debut production by the [Oliveira & Bachtler](#) team beautifully fuses flow movements with precision choreography in a world of absurd logic, where time works differently and beginnings, endings and middles can all exist together.



'Otus', by Company Oliveira & Bachtler

Otus has been commissioned by the [Coreo Cymru](#) creative dance programme, setting out to combine techniques of circus and dance into a high quality hybrid production. Company Oliveira & Bachtler are circus artists interested in movement possibilities: juggler [Hugo Oliveira](#), and aerialist [Sage Bachtler Cushman](#) (last seen together in [Bianco](#)). Dance

mentoring has come from contemporary dance-theatre pioneer [Wendy Houston](#). The scenography and costuming that complete this hourglass universe are subtly spun out of the simplest of materials by Bruno Capucho, and warmly lit by Sérgio Vilela.

There is no message delivered by the characters, who play fragments of relationship and co-existence, or retreat into darkness to allow the other a solo moment in the spotlight. The multitudinous wooden props, like children's building blocks, are built into structures, and carelessly or wilfully destroyed. The pair are oblivious creator gods, blind to consequence or life outside their realm.

From the start, Oliveira is the dominant partner, following the momentum of simple movements into elegant swoops of limbs, slipping a sequence of white balls or clownishy catching a stool into his tide of routine while Bachtler moves contrastingly slowly in her tasks. Later they come together, passing the energy of movement between them in a knock-on effect where one slapped arm determines a consequential body twist throwing the head backwards until gravity creates a fall, necessitating intervention again from the first party, and so on. Chairs and juggling balls are brought into the equation so that its unclear whether the contact impetus or the *préchac* came first.

Several times , Oliveira prevents Bachtler from completing her trajectory, lifting and moving her to a spot out of his own way and, though she seems resigned to this treatment, at times she retaliates with an antagonism of her own. They collaborate too, as he lifts her to the dance trapeze, or she passes the props he requires.



Hugo Oliveira in 'Otus'

Whilst the exact purpose of collecting small blocks in a vast swirl of skirt, spinning a square edged staff or finding comfort in the knots of rope and body high in the air may be impenetrable to us, it's clear the

actions have meaning for those inhabiting them. Perhaps we are watching the pair find meaning in their existence in order to bear it, a Nietzschean reflection of our own lives.

This is not just a show to be watched, however, but to be heard and to be felt, as the focus of rhythm shifts from the visual to the audible, or to the sensational as our own bodies respond to those spinning and moving through the air before us. The soundtrack of found songs and instrumental pieces is supplemented by a deft sense of the sounds produced physically onstage through footsteps, placed or tumbled blocks, or bodies connecting with each other.

As I posted on Twitter after the event, *Otus* is a 'sense-stirringly wonderful' show that proves the value of harnessing specialist expertise in cross-disciplinary experiments. Neither, as-we-know-it, dance nor circus, the resultant compound is a distinct success.



Sage Bachtler Cushman and Hugo Oliveira in 'Otus'

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