

Sprung, choreography Sue Peacock,
with Sue Peacock and Stefan Karlsson.
PICA, 16-19 June 2010
Rita Clarke

Sprung is said by its choreographer, Sue Peacock, to be in honour of, and an exploration of, the relevance of their acquired knowledge now that she and Stefan Karlsson are coming to the end of their performing lives. In fact Peacock says this will be her final performance and *Sprung* an attempt to work out who she and Karlsson are, and how they are, in the world.

Since *Sprung* opens with the two dressed as angels and playing Snap – as though life's fortunes are merely a turn up of the cards – we can guess that the attempt will incur some irreverence. A line of colourful discarded clothes stretched diagonally across the stage reflects the different roles both have been called upon to perform in. Stepping into these clothes for different dance sequences, the two start retracing their artistic lives. Karlsson and Peacock tell their different stories framed by crisp lighting and vast, beautifully designed changing backdrops (including floral wallpapers) by Andrew Lake and accompanied by Cathie Travers' music and well-known songs such as *Zorba the Greek* and Peggy Lee's *Is That All There Is?*

Peacock's style is remote at times – it can seem as if she's dancing in a firmament – yet beautiful. She can show devastating strength one minute and descend as gently to the floor as a piece of silk, the next. The contrast with Karlsson's debonair and insouciant movement is a force field to savour. Their marvellous duets are a furious fight at times - their solos personal and idiosyncratic.

Gender-based clothing – a man's tailored jacket and a woman's red dress and stilettos, are treated with disdain. Karlsson's jacket, when he's not in it, seems so animated it makes a duet into a trio; it's turned inside out, worn backwards, draped over the face and limbs, and wiped over the floor with Peacock hanging on. The red shoes are kicked on and off and the dress unceremoniously hauled up to obliterate the face. There are moments of cheekiness and togetherness, fights and isolation, humour and desperation. They are a wonderful combination, conveying through their considerable dramatic sensibility, satire, humour or a pathos that brings you up short.

What Peacock seems to be asking herself and Karlsson in *Sprung* is nothing less really than the big question – what is life and must we live it ultimately alone, whatever our circumstances? Consequently, they feel the need to throw verbal observations and anecdotes into the scenario – but the dialogue could do with some familiar wry, or heart-rending quotations from big thinkers (Shakespeare and Yeats come to mind) which would add depth to the script, just as the music and lyrics add poignancy to their well-chosen sound-scape.

As with most swan songs, Peacock looks back with a witty and humorous tenderness for a previous flawed self. And, all in all, as she and Karlsson lean ruefully against each other's shoulders, it's their acceptance of the incomprehensibility of life that adds import and universality to this very entertaining, and personal reflection.