

PERTH INTERNATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL

Carnal, bruised, sect symbols

PERFORMED by eight dancers and eight singers, *Borrowed Light* is delivered with clarity and purity. Finnish choreographer Tero Saarinen — trained in classical and contemporary dance and inspired by the visceral Japanese Butoh — based this 2004 production on the ideology and music of the radical Shaker sect whose edict was celibacy and simplicity.

During the barely 70-minute performance, 20 mostly redemptive Shaker songs were sung unaccompanied by the Boston Camerata, whose singers intermingled with Saarinen's dancers. The guileless songs, the sonorous blending of voices and the soaring beauty of French soprano Anne Azema's voice, in particular, bruised the psyche.

Borrowed Light opened on a gloomy stage with a spotlight, lone dancer. With her back to the audience, she moved in silence, until her boots and occasional thumping of limbs

DANCE

Borrowed Light

Tero Saarinen Company and Boston Camerata. His Majesty's Theatre, Perth, February 27.

stamped her mortal presence. In silence, other dancers joined her, emerging from the indigo background in black clothes leavened only by the skin of male chests and a tease of ecru petticoat.

The power of *Borrowed Light* is mainly defined by dancers performing in silence, or to the unembellished singing, all crowned by Mikki Kunttu's lighting. Piercing the darkness, it added metaphorical grist to the idea of humans being somewhere 'twixt angel and devil, as performers threaded their way, hopefully to redemption, through cathedral-like towers of light.

Erika Turunen's costumes added to the effect. Heavy looking, they were light in full flight. Black, waisted and circle-skirted for men and women, they allowed the wide-legged, full-armed devotional gestures to whirl into the austere, square, gloomy space.

The dancers had their backs to the audience most of the time. They danced in solos, and quartets — women and men separate — and in rare duets, where they hurled each other around by grasping the tan leather belts that clinched each waist. They limped and quivered in grotesque gestures, worried with self-flagellation, and soothed with haunting solos.

The emotional depth the dancers reached was astounding, as each was cocooned in their commitment to divest the body of carnal desire. It was dance of repetitive magnetism and supreme artistry.

Rita Clarke



Good exercise: Dancers perform Finnish choreographer Tero Saarinen's *Borrowed Light*