

Review: Dance Umbrella, various venues, London

By Mark Monahan

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It's not every Sunday lunchtime that one finds oneself sitting cross-legged on a black bin-liner, on the Baker Street pavement, with 30-40 others, all gawping into the window of the Bathstore bathroom shop.

Which is probably just as well. But such is the venue for Rodrigo Pardo's Toilet Tango.

Necessity being as ever the mother of invention, the dancer-choreographer came up with the idea of tangoing (with fellow Argentinian Cristina Cortés) in a replica of his little Buenos Aires bathroom when he was having trouble finding a place to perform.

And the result is short, sweet, loony, and lovely. As we peer in through the glass, he enters in very un-sexy white undies, performs his ablutions, and purposefully dons his smart black tails, which are hanging on the wall.

Then, suddenly, music blasts through some external speakers, the already lavishly-dressed Cortés joins him with a flourish, and they strut their stuff.

The actual, very good dancing – in a 10ft x 5ft bathroom, let's not forget – lasts barely five minutes, but what exuberance the duo pack into that.

One second, she's strutting with the sure-footedness of a mountain lioness along the edge of the bath. (In heels! You try that.)

Then, with his support, she's walking round the wall, at 90 degrees to it.

And, as a grand finale, he does a headstand – in the loo bowl. Ridiculous? Quite so.

But, as a zesty, charmingly imaginative little reminder of dance's ability to transform any space – a bathroom, a footpath, you name it – into something very special indeed, it's splendid, and goes down like a hot little mocha on a cold autumn day.

Contrastingly, crushed by the weight of its own earnestness is another of this year's Dance

Umbrella offerings, Canadian troupe O Vertigo's La Chambre Blanche.

At a rather more conventional venue – The Place, near Euston – this is set in a sort of bleak, furniture-less Turkish bath, which becomes a claustrophobic hell for nine dancers (also, as it happens, in plain underwear).

Imagine an achingly modern, conceptual, dance version of Sartre's hell-is-other-people drama *Huis Clos*, but directed by David Lynch, and you get some idea of the effect – it's a strange, smart idea, and full of edge.

But, oh heavens, it's po-faced, and, in terms of movement, the lasting impression is of far too many over-theatrical variations on the same theme.

It had me consulting my watch a good 30 minutes before it wrapped.

Also at The Place, Tiago Guedes's *Various Materials* sees the slight Portuguese fellow fuse mime and a child-like imagination into a strange, almost music-free show with echoes of a kindergarten art class.

All newspaper, spray paint, sticky tape and bin-liners (them again), it's also way too long. Still, its quiet, dry wit keeps you watching, wondering what sort of off-beat, low-fi alchemy he's going to perform next.

Dance Umbrella until Nov 8. Details: www.danceumbrella.co.uk

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