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Classic gets a raunchy makeover

DANCE THEATRE

Giselle

Fabulous Beast Dance Theatre. Director: Michael Keegan-Dolan. Perth Convention Centre, February 28. Tickets: \$40-\$60. Bookings: (08) 9484 1133. Until March 8

RURAL Ireland is no country for young women; nor is a rural Irish cemetery, after dark, a country for young men who have let those women down. It is, however, an apt setting for Michael Keegan-Dolan's modern version of *Giselle*, inspired by the story of a girl of 15 who was found dying with her lifeless, newborn baby beside a statue of the Virgin Mary in 1984.

In his interpretation, Keegan-Dolan turns the tables on most things sacred to classical ballet. The idyllic village festivities of the first act are replaced by spiteful humour. Innocent folk dance is taken over by an alien and erotically charged linedancing.

Why the villagers take to toeing the line in their leisure moments as well as in their day-to-day activities is, however, a mystery. Perhaps it's the cowboy boots and the lure of the teacher Albrecht, newly arrived from Bratislava. In Keegan-Dolan's hands, this is no noble prince, but an alley-prowling, bisexual blow-in.

From the opening, menacing approach of various men to the bent body of a young girl scrubbing the floor, we are gradually drawn into the macabre goings-on of this dark community.

An impartial narrator (*Giselle's* father, sitting high on a pole), adds theatrical impact

to the cast of nine men and two women, a motley of nationalities who brilliantly enact the saga in a weave of invective, dark humour, brazen body gestures, song and contemporary dance. Philip Feeney's score is particularly effective in its harsh, drawn-out notes and hard silences.

The stage design by Sophie Charalambous — built around a butcher's block, trapdoors and tin dustbins — and the lighting by Adam Silverman add incalculably to Keegan-Dolan's diverse and gripping choreography. The linedancing is all elbows and knees, while the dance of the souls of the abandoned, dead women rising up in clouds of dust is dramatically sinuous and gory.

Daphne Strothmann as *Giselle* is alluring and stunning. Her duets with Milos Galiko (Albrecht), who spins her around and around in the dark cemetery, have a strange, appealing starkness.

This *Giselle* was created in a barn in County Longford back in 2003 and has been nominated for several awards: the performers wear the roles like a second skin. It is grimly different from the original and brings an unsentimental dimension to its implied injustices.

Rita Clarke