



Giselle has sex, violence — and the odd dance

DANCE

Giselle
 Fabulous Beast Dance Theatre
 Perth Convention Centre
 Review: Tim Balfour

Set in a rural Irish village inhabited by the depraved and unhinged, Michael Keegan-Dolan's hard-bitten dance theatre version of *Giselle* is packed with sex, violence and vulgarity — with a dance or two thrown in for good measure.

While there are no Rhineland peasants cavorting with nobility in Dolan's version of *Giselle*, the bare bones of the traditional two-act ballet's libretto remain relatively intact.

In Dolan's version, *Giselle* (Daphne Strothmann) is a mute asthmatic, Hilarion is her brain-damaged, incestuous brother, and her love-interest Albrecht is a philandering, bisexual Bratislavan line-dancing teacher. This version sees *Giselle* die after Hilarion (Michael Dolan) shows her Albrecht (Milos Galcko) engaged in sex with Pat, the butcher's son.

Dressed in dark suits and dresses, the predominantly male cast play a mostly unsympathetic community bound by secrets, lies and deceit. The scenery is sparse and consists of dark wooden floorboards, a white backdrop and an electricity pole, on

which *Giselle*'s father (Bill Lengfelder) sits and narrates throughout the work. No easy task, to be sure.

Fans of line-dancing will be thrilled to know that this particular genre of dance features prominently in the first act, but the dancing is a

long time in coming. Dolan holds off on any dance for about the first half hour and instead relies on dialogue to set the narrative

wheels in motion. In this respect, the company spit their obscenity-laden lines with confidence and conviction, and folk songs and verse are handled with equal aplomb. Also of note are countertenor Angelo Smimmo's transcendent vocals, which are an unexpected treat among the wealth of theatrical disciplines on show.

While these performances are all strong, a little more dancing would have been good, because the company obviously moves well.

Dolan's performance as the wretched axe-wielding Hilarion is particularly good.

The twisted and sexually voracious Nurse Mary (Lorena Randi) is another highlight and her domineering persona and bawdy romps provide some of the best sardonic moments.

As per the original, *Giselle* is

transformed into a restless spirit, among a gathering of vengeful female spirits (in this case, males dressed in sheer, white dresses). But what really makes the second act work are Sophie Charalambous' designs and Adam Silverman's unobtrusive yet effective lighting, especially when the spirits menacingly open up their graves.

Again showcasing the work's slick technical aspects, heavy ropes drop near the performers with precision timing. The spirits each tie a big noose in the ropes from which they hang, spin and eventually run and "fly" toward the audience.

After the spirits kill Hilarion, Strothmann and Galcko begin a fluid partnering sequence, comprised of well-executed rolling lifts and counterbalance work. Considering this is a key point in the performance, however, this section comes across as surprisingly diminished and characterless.

In its entirety, Dolan's *Giselle* is filled with memorable imagery, but the image that will likely stick — other than the sexually gratuitous ones — is the artistic vision of the closing sequence. Freed from the spirit world, *Giselle* is surrounded by an all-consuming white light as Adolphe Adam's original *Giselle* score can be heard.

Giselle runs until Sunday.



Hard-bitten: Secret, lies and deceit in Giselle