



Rushes - Movement of the Human

21 February 2017, Lower NZI Aotea Centre, Auckland
Auckland Fringe
Reviewed by Sarah Knox

Shadowy figures are poised on tiptoe, eyes closed, faces showing varied degrees of patience, concentration, serenity and discomfort. As we filter excitedly into the first room of *Rushes*, we are forced to slow and negotiate the precariousness of the dancers. We involuntarily participate as we weave through the group, no longer certain who is who. Moments of voyeurism are playfully presented and the audience begins to meander, chatter and document.

A dream team of movement (Malia Johnston), music, (Eden Mulholland), light (Jo Kilgour), projection (Rowan Pierce), and design (John Verryt) have created a paper walled world, containing multiple rooms, of varying sizes, each a surprise, a delight, a feat, to happen upon. Johnston is masterful at complexifying simplicity with her signature explorations of balance, proximity, spatial restriction, and endurance. Mulholland's live musical landscape inhabits the space with messages of connection.

Each space presents new encounters: an endless teetering embrace behind a smoky veil, a woman in a red dress forever waiting, a miniscule violinist down a long peep hole, a room full of balloons bumping against each other in response to a dancer's movement, a white beam of light shrinking a trio of dancers into an ever more confined space, a writhing, shimmering torso far in the distance, scattered paper shards remain of a wild dance once performed for an empty row of chairs, a platform of visitors endlessly coming and going, a pulsating room of loud morphing movement. The paper labyrinth plays tricks on the eye and experience of where we might be led and what might emerge through the walls.

The performers are diverse in age and performance background, dancers, actors, creators; some leaders in our dance community and others at the cusp of a career. The joy and togetherness of spirit and physicality emanates from every single member as they select what room or task to engage in, quietly stopping on their way to greet audience friends.

Authenticity and energy seeps heavily from every brow and pupil. Each

performer is dressed in an outfit of their choice, carefully revealing details about identity, desire and flair.

There are several metaphorical reflections of the current state of our professional dance community. Physical perseverance, endurance of attention, care and neglect of others, selfish moments in the light, and we all fumble in the dark. Towards the end we gather in the largest space watching a dance party subvert itself – the dancers fall to the ground exhausted. But then, they begin to rise, reaching, stretching upwards like a vine into the light. Then, one, two, three, several dancers push them down again repeatedly but they can't quite smother them enough. The other dancers continue to fight. There is an undeniable uprising on its way. They are spinning, spinning, spinning, and then balancing once more, masked, sightless. An audience member extends a hand to steady a swaying dancer and I believe that in amongst our creative, social and cultural challenges, somehow, we will be okay.

IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE A MUST-DO

Auckland Fringe 2017

RUSHES

Direction: Malia Johnston

Live music: Eden Mulholland

Video art and film: Rowan Pierce

Set design: John Verryt

Lighting: Jo Kilgour

Graphic design: Ian Hammond

Lower NZI, Level 1, Aotea Centre, Auckland

From 21 Feb 2017 to 25 Feb 2017 [1 hr 15 mins]

Reviewed by Kendall Jones, 22 Feb 2017

There's a certain magic about a transformed space. A magic that has successfully been created by the artists of Movement of The Human, with their theatrical experience *Rushes*.

As I walk into the Lower NZI in Aotea Centre, I am transported out of the ordinary and into what is distinctly a performance-ready space. Large sheets of white paper construct the walls of a makeshift bar area which doubles as an anticipatory holding pen for the audience.

As the audience mingles, haze and purple lights add to an atmosphere created by music playing just above conversation level. This immediate immersion into *Rushes* indicates we already may be experiencing a performance. Eden Mullholland encourages this feeling as he appears in an entrance to the white-walled space, microphone in hand, singing. Mullholland turns and moves into the room behind him exposing a space dotted with multiple dancers.

The audience follows and enters the room. Eyes closed, dancers fill the space, attempting to maintain their balance as they stand with their heels lifted. The dancers endeavour to remain still, aided by outstretched arms. The forest of bodies obstructs the audience from moving towards the doorway at the opposite end of the room. Between the dancers there's just enough space to invite the audience to navigate through the bodies, forcing an immediate intimacy between audience and performers.

This room is the first of many. The white paper walls construct distinct rooms, corridors, and paths which manage to both direct and deceive the audience. Each of these spaces offers a different performance moment, relationship or context.

Some audience members promptly move through the first room to the next, others linger. This begins the disintegration of the audience as one group, and individuals start to coordinate their own *Rushes* experience.

I move into a second room where black cloth creates a box containing two dancers elevated on a pedestal. Projected light creates patterns on the black fabric and the bodies inside are blurred and faces obscured. The dancers move in intimate proximity to each other, wrapping around one another. In contrast to the previous room where I felt invited to be close to the balancing dancers, here I feel oddly intrusive, gazing at the two dancers as they embrace. As I watch the performers, my moment of intrigue is pleasantly disrupted by a conversation of two other audience members as they discuss the source of light. This unique performance space allows for such interactions because the audience can be relaxed through creating their own experience.

Sitting, standing, watching, participating or talking, as an audience we are not dictated by an assumed appropriate etiquette, rather encouraged to immerse ourselves within *Rushes* however we feel.

I continue moving through the many rooms, and some particular highlights include discovering hidden areas glimpsed in a restricted way through small gaps in the white walls. The diverse performance moments of *Rushes* toy with my comfort and voyeurism as an audience member. Whether peering through a peephole to a forlorn looking woman or interrupting a solo dance moment by swinging balloons into the mover, I am able to experiment with my own engagement with the work.

As the audience travels the space, the performers also swiftly navigate their way from room to room, performance to performance. This creates a particularly intriguing aspect of *Rushes*, as I am now aware that I am constantly missing out on something. The multiple simultaneous performance moments mean that as an audience member I am momentarily excluded from various dance, acting, lighting or live music performances. Upon returning to any room I find new performers or an additional immersive element.

With more than 25 dancers and the many audience members, each performance interaction is a unique experience for all present. After a satisfying journey through this space the self-directed element of the performance is disrupted by the dancers. The audience swarms towards the largest of the rooms where a final dance moment brings all performers together. A particularly pleasant ingredient of *Rushes* is highlighted in these final moments of the experience, the diverse performance cohort. Regardless of age, reputation, or discipline, each performer holds a significant role in the magic that is *Rushes*.

My experience of *Rushes* is unique, and this will continue as I am certain there will be further surprises each performance night this week. This show manages to be both welcoming for those who may be intimidated by a typical theatre setting, whilst also being engaging for those more confident to experiment with audience participation.

Movement of The Human and contributing artists have transformed multiple art disciplines into an immersive experience that is a must-see(do) during this Auckland Fringe Festival!

Rushes
By The
Pantograph
Punch



Rushes provides the perfect start to Auckland Fringe 2017. A transformative, joyful new interdisciplinary work from choreographer Malia Johnston collaborating with over 30 dancers, musicians and designers, *Rushes* is a boundary-breaking promenade work which transforms the awkwardly conference-like Lower NZI Room into a soft neon and white festival of spaces and bodies.

Over 75 minutes, dancers weave through spectators who are free to curate their own experience, ambling through, resting in, or revisiting various rooms or 'chapters', containing poetic interplays of light, space and twisting bodies.

There's a cheeky inventiveness to the peep-holes looking into new worlds and spaces which place audience as unwitting performers. From simple beginnings, the work builds to a pulsating upheaval. *Rushes* is an immersive balm for your busy brain - that amount of bodies encompassing you as a company alone is deeply gratifying, and mixed with hypnotically oscillating live music, spatial playfulness and attention to all-sensory detail, this work is a Fringe must-see. - *KP*

Aotea Centre, Tuesday 21 to Saturday 25 February

Dance review: Rushes

By Raewyn Whyte



Eden Mulholland's music is a unifying thread through the performing art work, *Rushes*. Photo: Steve Bone Photography.

RUSHES is the perfect festival event, leaving audience members smiling, energised and comparing the highlights of an hour or so of an immersion into live art.

Dreamed up by choreographer/director Malia Johnston, *RUSHES* is a collaboration with Eden Mullholland (music), John Verryt (scenic design), Rowan Pierce (AV design) and Jo Kilgour (lighting design) hosted by Auckland Live.

The result is the transformation of the Aotea Centre's Lower NZI convention centre into a temporary "art gallery" of 11 living artworks in separate spaces featuring a rich hybrid of live dance and music, sculpture and projected imagery.

None of the installations remain the same for more than a few seconds. You can linger and absorb, move on slowly or rapidly, take a quick tour to find the most entrancing room and settle in there, or keep on circling until the last minutes when the (temporary) walls threaten to come down.

There are amazing things to see including a whirling

holographic vortex which hangs in mid-air, a room full of teetering bodies who seem to be sharing a spiritual state, a peep show wall which provides tantalising glimpses of mysteriously writhing surfaces, and a steady stream of solos, duets and trios from some of the country's best dancers. It's simultaneously relaxing, energising, entrancing, playful, immersive, fanciful, inspiring and entirely delightful. Mulholland's deliciously variegated live music, with cameo insets, is the unifying thread for *RUSHES* which draws to a close with his haunting yet driving, *I can taste the virus*. It brings all the performers and audience into the same space at last and is a stirring and perfect finale.

**What: Auckland Fringe Festival - Rushes Where & when:
Lower NZI, Aotea Centre; Reviewed by Raewyn Whyte**

- [NZ Herald](#)

SCENE BY JAMES: Thank Dionysus for Auckland Fringe
March 8, 2017 James Wenley Auckland Fringe Festival, Scene by James

Full Review go to <http://www.theatrescenes.co.nz/scene-by-james-thank-dionysus-for-auckland-fringe/>

Excerpt follows

“Allow me to gush about *Rushes*, created by Malia Johnston, a dance work and so much more. It was my favourite experience of this Fringe. The Lower NZI of the Aotea Centre was turned into a number of different spaces that you could walk through (or spy via a peephole). The audience could travel where they liked, and observe different choreographic creations. Each area had specific ‘rules’, but within that the dancers could improvise moment-to-moment, and the close proximity that we were afforded as audience allowed us to appreciate their effort even more. *Rushes* was an oasis of beauty, and I found it profoundly moving.”

2017 Auckland Fringe Award Winners

Friday, 17 March 2017, 4:48 pm

Press Release: **Auckland Fringe Festival**

Media Release: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

2017 Auckland Fringe Award Winners

AUCKLAND FRINGE FESTIVAL

21st February - 12th March 2017

Auckland Fringe. after three weeks of city-wide performance, installations and community events, our panel of 22 industry judges sat down together to play a giant game of critical tug-of-war. Three and a half hours later, we had a list of the most superlative, virtuosic and downright Fringey moments of the festival. Without further ado, here are the winners of the 2017 Auckland Fringe Awards:

BEST IN FRINGE: ‘Rushes’ directed by Malia Johnston in collaboration with Eden Mulholland & Rowan Pierce

BEST ENSEMBLE: The cast of ‘Rushes’

BEST PRODUCTION DESIGN - LIGHTING & AV: RUSHES Jo Kilgour (lighting) & Rowan Pierce (AV) for ‘Rushes’