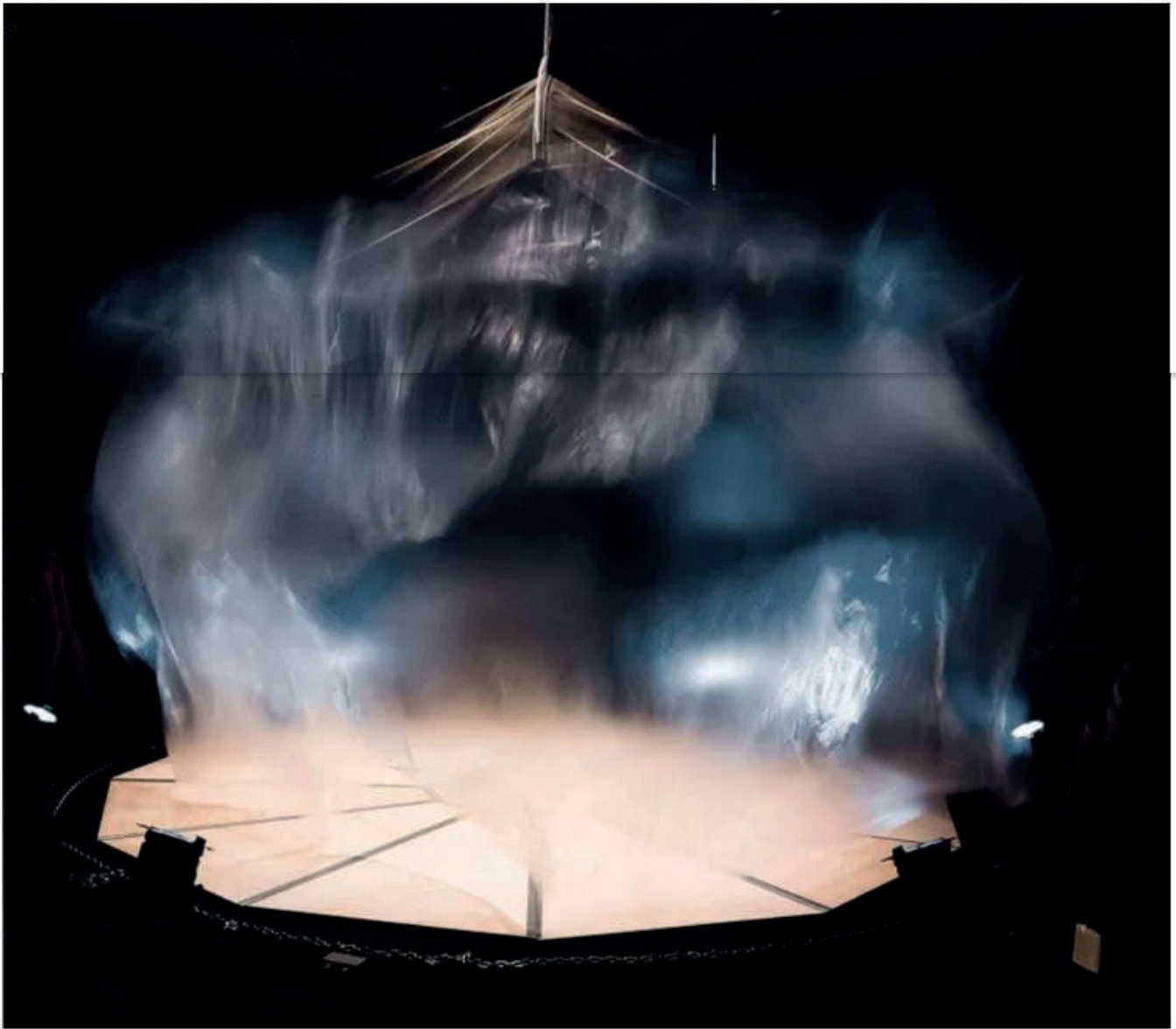


THE CIRCUS DIARIES

Circus Thoughts From Circus People



SHOW REVIEWS

'Santuaire Sauvage', by Collectif Rafale

by Ruby Burgess 20th November 2019

Review from: Circus City, Bristol; 1st November 2019

Sanctuaire Sauvage is a full body experience that awakens the senses. This show by **Collectif Rafale** challenges us to not just rely on our sight as our means of receiving. We are seated in the round, facing a cylinder of plastic sheeting hung in the middle of the space. We peer through the veil at blurry shapes of bodies as they scrape, slide and thud. A soundscape of birds and rustling leaves accompanies a muffled voice speaking in French and English. The venue is a converted warehouse and the heavy rain outside adds to a feeling of being out in nature.

The set is like an evolving sculpture. There are rigged poles that rise and fall, giant plastic sheets that sweep across the stage and at one point buckets and buckets of pebbles that cascade onto the floor in a never-ending stream. The sounds are rich and full, in a way that convinces me to close my eyes in some moments to fully absorb them. The show draws on stories of the non-sighted father of two of Collectif Rafale's founders (acrobat Sonia and scenographer Cécile Massou), whose blindness means he experiences circus in a different way to most. **The company experimented with different ways of performing to him** and their research has resulted in a multitude of innovative methods of using sound to communicate. It is difficult as a sighted person to say how effectively accessible the performance was, but they certainly explored a range of techniques.

One section in particular highlights the spectrum of possibilities when it comes to **audio description**. There is a lone juggler centre stage (Thibaut Lezervant) and he begins by vocally describing the physical action; 'one ball in left hand, two in right hand, left hand to left temple' etc. This continues, getting progressively more complicated until it is verging on absurdity and the audience laughs at the difficulty of describing such complex choreography. He has microphones taped to each of his wrists so we can hear the balls landing in his hands. Once we have established what's happening, the specific moves become irrelevant, the rhythm of the catches becoming the focus.

The performers also use their voices to fill the space throughout; whispering as they run round the edges and yelling as they run in from four different directions, their bodies slamming into each other as they collide at the intersections. In some of the high level acrobatic sequences, the performers are quietly letting us into their inner monologue, which also locates them in the space. They remark about liking a moment because 'I'm really high' or mumble about what they need to think about to execute the trick. We swing between these sharp moments of clarity and a hazy dream-like state. This show left me feeling grounded in my body and considering how I experience the world.