

***A Male Ant Has Straight Antennae***

Choreographed by Mandeep Raikhy

**26 August 2015 | 8pm | 72-13**

**Reviewed by Ariel Sammy**

The atmosphere in the studio is disquieting. Dancers stride back and forth in silence, shadows looming in the dappled yellow light of the stage. It appears as though they are in a trance if not for their laser focused stares. Veering from merely unsettling to borderline voyeuristic, their unrelenting gaze builds to palpable aggression. And so, they pace.

When the dancers spring into action, a sequence of movement bolstered by a sudden jolt of the music is electric. As an ensemble piece, Mandeep Raikhy's *A Male Ant Has Straight Antennae* imbues the mundane with intensity. Performers are thrust into the numerous manifestations of masculinity as drawn from daily life, while underscored by synth and vestiges of industrial noise.

Engaging with the male form in a manner both visceral and confronting, the dancers contort themselves into positions bordering on vulgar- an effect only heightened by their varying stages of undress. They grasp at their bodies lasciviously, unapologetically. Audience members shift uneasily in their seats and yet are unable to look away, forced to acknowledge the erotically charged reality the dancers embody.

Amidst the provocative choreography, the group's lone female performer holds her own, wielding the hyper-sexualised movements with a savage authority. The rest of the ensemble looms over her, alpha males with a predatory gaze. Refusing to be dwarfed, her presence illuminates the themes of a dance driven by gender and anatomical differences.

The 55-minute performance is an amalgamation of several dance vignettes with similar motifs threaded throughout as the dancers meld classical Indian dance forms with contemporary. Not all sequences inspire the same initial discomfort; rather, tension waxes and wanes. In one, a dancer pops his hip and slouches his upper torso, carelessly camp. A military bark from another male dancer disrupts his efforts to adopt the handbag toting socialite stereotype and he snaps back to attention in a playful commentary on self-policing genders.

The choreography takes a lighthearted turn half way through the performance, where dancers engage in a cheeky rivalry. A trio of dancers dart across the stage, and measure the length of their body parts against each other in a bizarre "anything you can do I can do better" repartee. The exaggerated arm gestures, comparing the length of a dancer's shin to another one's buttocks, draw a laugh from the audience who take impish delight in the face off. The partner work comes off effortlessly as the piece segues into a street fight. An avenue for virtuosity, the dancers leap, lift, dodge and tumble, each display of physicality leading seamlessly to the next.

The dancers turn to face the audience twice in this piece, acknowledging their viewers at the start and at the close. As the music gives way to silence for the final time and the dancers resume pacing, their piercing gaze is what lends this piece its potency. It ends not with finality but an implication- the audience has become complicit in this unorthodox exploration of modern day masculinity.

