

Future Memory

Choreographer/performer: Rani Nair

2 September 2015 | 8pm | 72-13

Reviewed by Leonard Ng

It's So Hard to Say Goodbye to Yesterday

We begin with a white room. Upstage, in the middle of the white floor, there is a black chair. A few red letters hang from a hook on the ceiling. There is nothing else on stage.

Rani Nair, choreographer and performer of *Future Memory*, is welcoming the audience into the theatre. "Please switch your phones off for the performance... (I'll keep mine though)"... she smiles, charmingly. When everyone is seated she walks to a corner of the stage, says "Okay, we'll begin", and without any further ado we're off. The house lights however stay up.

The white room is symbolic of the studio, of the blank creative space waiting to be filled. But in this case that symbol lies, for *Future Memory* is haunted by the legacy of another performance piece: *Dixit Dominus*, created by the German choreographer Kurt Jooss in 1976 for the dancer Lilavati Häger. Lilavati's husband Bengt passed the piece on to Nair after Lilavati's death, along with all the associated costumes and other accoutrements. Nair actually did reconstruct and tour with *Dixit Dominus* for a few years, but the attempt seems to have taken its toll. Tonight's performance — *Future Memory* — refers directly to this complicated history.

Nair mischievously deconstructs *Dixit Dominus* (and the persona of Lilavati) throughout, going as far as to bring in a television set with a video of Lilavati performing. Perched on the TV trolley, she passes irreverent comments about the performance, "She's always late here... these flamenco steps turn into some sort of Indian disco dance..." The way they've done it you can't hear the sound of her dancing. She brings in Lilavati's costumes, perfume, and jewellery, and gets the audience to examine them. In one particularly memorable segment she animates one of Lilavati's unused costumes by blowing on it with a hairdryer, making it appear to be dancing. A whiff of the ridiculous is seldom far away.

But all this quirkiness is there to make one thing abundantly clear: Nair is profoundly uncomfortable with being the inheritor of *Dixit Dominus*. The first twenty minutes see Nair slowly circling the edges of the white space, watching Lilavati's performance on her phone, vocalising unintelligibly. Finally and tentatively she enters the space, occupies the chair, gets up in a hurry, and sweeps about the stage with frantic air swats. This is not a space Nair wants to be in. And at the end — in an inspired set-piece — Nair puts on a tape of Jooss's voice counting beats, places a microphone by the speaker, and begins to perform an increasingly laboured parody of *Dixit Dominus*. Finally, flat on her butt on the floor, she gives up and trudges off, taking the microphone with her. But its long cable remains on stage after Nair herself has left it, a visual cue linking her to this albatross that she can't leave behind.