

Trouble Festival

Performance, and then some



Contemporary performance is a notoriously troublesome art form. To begin with it's difficult to define. Nearly anything can be considered a "performance" depending on one's perspective. And it can be a little awkward, too, with artists insisting on

"breaking down the traditional barriers" between performer and spectator.

Les Halles' Trouble Festival, now in its eighth edition, unpacks these difficulties uniquely. Not only is there a wide range of performances and performers, but the concepts driving the form are also highlighted through discussion and debate.

Trouble's guest partner this year is Poland's Interakcje, one of the eight sister festivals in the European network A Space for Living Art. Interakcje is based in Piotrkow Trybunalski, where it has held its International Festival of the Art of Action for more than a decade.

Since both Trouble and Interakcje are motivated by a self-conscious challenge every year to remain innovative, it's no surprise to find theory worked explicitly into the programme. There is, for example, a Friday afternoon debate on the complicated relationship between contemporary performance and the arts establishment. An international panel will convene to compare notes on the varying levels of institutional support offered in different corners of Europe. We eggheads will also enjoy Writing Shop, a nightly resume of the day's performances, with discussion by six respected critics drawn from across the Continent.

Lady Zone is another recurring feature in this year's programme, spotlighting a different female performer every night. The Lady Zone finale, Wanda and Nova deViator's Transmittance #2.1, is a high-tech, audio/visual karaoke session.

The Fragile! cycle gives six students from La Cambre's visual arts section the chance to show off what they learned in school. The performances certainly look promising in outline, especially David Zagari's Framing Art— Spacing Reality, which advertises a special choreography involving unsuspecting volunteers, full bladders and a "final release".

Italian performance art ensemble Ricci/Forte stages, meanwhile, stages Wunderkammer Soap, a nightly series of 20-minute vignettes inspired by Christopher Marlowe and the American soap opera, and they let us peek into the private lives of washed-up screen diva Faust (pictured), Dido the transsexual prostitute and the predatory virago Hero.

There are of course loads of stand-alone pieces on the agenda, too, including the festival's opener, Laurie Anderson's Dirday. The performance, co-produced by and held at Bozar, sees the esteemed New Yorker continuing the meditation on post-9/11 American culture that she began on her Grammy-nominated album Homeland. She does so through a sequence of alternating spoken word, solo violin and ambient passages.

The fifth and final day of Trouble is capped by a late-night dance party hosted by DJ Majella. If this decidedly generic genre of celebration sounds incongruous, one might think of the DJ booth as an installation and the dance floor as a performance space in which formal boundaries are demolished and social relationships re-imagined.