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## Opera Bluebeard Tramway, Glasgow

★★★★☆

If you want to experience the thrilling interface where music, visual art, theatre and digital technology meet, hasten to Glasgow where the sparky new Sonica festival has taken over venues across the city. And hasten especially to *Bluebeard*, from the brilliant Dutch 331/3 collective.

As its title suggests, it is loosely based on Bartók's dark 1918 opera about male sadism and fatal female curiosity. But loosely is the word. For copyright reasons the prerecorded 50-minute score has only a few hints of Bartók. Nor are there any live performers. But the video realisation does retain the essential story of a woman opening seven chamber of horrors, in this case containing just about every modern nightmare — from random massacres and serial axe murders to Middle Eastern warfare and ecological disaster.

Some of the imagery is pretty repulsive, but the presentation is stunning. Images flicker and merge across a swivelling white cube and the floor with a sophistication that makes the video projections in conventional opera and theatre productions seem like your grandad's home movies.

*Bluebeard* is the jewel in Sonica's crown, but this ambitious festival (run by Cathie Boyd's Cryptic) has many other fascinations. Rather gingerly I let myself be led through Sven Werner's creepy *Tales of Magical Realism, Part 2*. Audience members are briefly detained by a mad staring ballerina, then guided by duetting female vocalists through dingy corridors to a hall where they are seated in front of four otherworldly peep-shows, culminating in a nonstop cycle ride on a penny-farthing. Make of that what you will.

Even stranger is Claudia Molitor's *Remember Me*. This revisits the tales of four mythic lovers — Dido and Aeneas; Orpheus and Euridice — according to the women's viewpoint, and plays out the drama as an exquisitely detailed miniature opera inside a Victorian woman's writing-desk. Molitor presents it with a suitably enigmatic smile and musical nods to Purcell and Gluck. A bemusing half-hour, but I loved the Turkish Delight she mysteriously handed out halfway through.

Alongside these performances are plenty of sonic-art installations. Mookyoung Shin's *Our Contemporaries* bitterly satirises humdrum modern existence as dozens of mechanical hands, their fingers frenetically clattering away in response to the commands of a random electric circuit. In gentler mode, Kathy Hinde's *Piano Migrations* delightfully projects a video of birds swooping round telegraph lines onto a real piano, while wired-up hammers strike the strings, seemingly in response to the birds' movements.

Best of all is Janek Schaefer's *Extended Play*, which memorialises his mother's childhood in wartime Warsaw. Evoking the folksongs used by the BBC to send coded messages to the Polish Resistance, this consists of nine gramophones playing vinyl records, each containing an instrumental line derived from one of those songs. As you approach each gramophone its needle momentarily falters. Not only does that constantly mutate the music, it also suggests that memories of wartime heroism can still interact with our lives today. Haunting, elegiac and beautiful.

**Richard Morrison**

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