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Edinburgh Dance

Hangman

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★★★★★ Assembly @ Aurora Nova, Edinburgh

Lyn Gardner
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Dangerous games ... DO-Theatre's Hangman. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod

The latest show from Russia's DO-Theatre is yet another piece in this year's Fringe about the power of words and the dangerous games we play as we try to twist their meaning. But, like a crossword that ends in death, this is a game that the protagonists can only lose, and in Hangman they dance merrily towards the final desperate endgame, set in a bleak wasteland where a broken doll's body swings upon a gibbet.

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Hangman is a series of vignettes in which justice seems to be delivered in an entirely random fashion. This beautiful, precisely executed work is full of astonishing images. A trinity of the damned - the blind, deaf and dumb - perform a danse macabre of crime and punishment in which the roles of victim and executioner are constantly swapped. Books fly like squawking birds through the air. Two ladies who lunch in a Fawlty Towers-style restaurant scoop brains out of a man's head. Bureaucrats stamp documents determining the fates of others until they, too, fall victim to the same treatment. In a world where words cannot be trusted and letters can be manipulated, nobody is safe.

The dancers in Hangman know this all too well; still they clown around, wistful figures with wan smiles who whirl their way towards their fate. They dance, even as they know that the axe may fall on them at any moment, and that it may be their own gibbet that is being constructed on the edge of the stage.

DO's previous work includes Hopeless Games - a show that still haunts my dreams, years on. If you have seen them before, you will probably find little surprising here, and the itsy-bitsiness of the structure sometimes makes it feel as if the whole thing is more concerned with sensibility than sense, with giving the audience a firework display of images. But what images they are! Words fail me.

• Until August 25. Box office: 0131-623 3030.

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