

The Guide

The best of this week's **Books, Arts & Culture** in review



Jonathan Mitchell and Justine Cooper in CoisCéim Dance Theatre's *Go To Blazes*; it feels like its own strange beast

STE MURRAY

Immersive Joycean production embodies scents and sensibility



Sara Keating on culture

Go To Blazes
by David Bolger

CoisCéim Studio, 42 Fairview Strand,
Dublin 3

Currently screening until December 2

In more than 20 years of professional theatre-going I have never seen the role of “scents” appear on a theatre programme. Indeed, **Go to Blazes**, a new dance theatre piece from David Bolger, is a singular kind of event.

Although it has been programmed as part of the year-long Ulysses 2.2 initiative – a series of 18 works commissioned by ANU, Landmark Productions and MoLI – it feels like its own strange beast. Episode four of James Joyce’s monumental novel may have provided its inspirational seed, but Bolger and his collaborators at CoisCéim Dance Theatre have jumped off the edge of mainstream response and performative form, creating an immersive experience that manipulates the physical senses for a uniquely hybrid live and digital event.

Dancer Justine Cooper is our guide through the 30-minute performance. She is also credited for scents, and smell provides a vital touchstone throughout. In the CoisCéim studio – a redbrick former post office on Fairview Strand – the scent of burning oils suffuses the air. The foyer holds more concrete physical clues to the performance’s origin: a map of Joyce’s Dublin, with Fairview Strand bordering its northern edge; a china teacup; books about music; and musical scores. A white sheet hangs at an angle in one corner, the shadow of a body shimmering across its surface.

Cooper ushers us inside to a high-ceilinged hall that serves as the evening’s auditorium. There is exposed brickwork, a distressed piano, and a cabinet of curiosities which houses various vials full of smells. Posing as a professor of perfume, Cooper makes a case for the sensory stimulation that the nose uniquely offers: demonstrating a not quite convincing relationship to musical notation and an absolutely convincing relationship to emotional memory, which the rest of the performance, played out in movement and dance, exploits.

As we pull on “neptunian goggles” (VR headsets), our visual environment shifts, but with the lingering scent in the room we are both anchored in the present physical moment of the staging and drawn into a different virtual world. Here, Leopold

and Molly Bloom (Jonathan Mitchell and Cooper) enact an intimate tussle over table linen, and the ghost of a young woman (Rosie Stebbing) who might be Milly Bloom, or her real-life counterpart Lucia Joyce, spins life from low-hung sails.

Go to Blazes seems to ask: What can dance do that words cannot? In this case, dance can bring the bodily reality of Joyce’s characters and their experience of the world into sharp focus. Ulysses is, after all, full of excretion and excreta: urine and faeces, semen and saliva. Its characters are driven by human appetite for sex and love. In his choreography, created in collaboration with the dancers, Bolger gives us all this in unstinting, up-close, intimate detail. The effect is both sexy and chilling.

There are just two more chances to see Go to Blazes today, before the performance dissolves into the ephemera of this centenary year.

Getting a taste for Joyce

Ulysses 2.2, meanwhile, continues, with two final experiments being staged in the city in November and December. **Oh - Infamy - We Eat Electric Light** is a film installation from Iarlaith Ní Fheorais and Emma Wolf-Haugh. Inspired by Episode 15, Circe, it charts a hallucinatory night-time journey through Dublin, where Wolf-Haugh stalks the city streets in the shape of Joyce himself, using drag, dance and text to animate encounters with the darker side of Dublin. It runs at the Oonagh Young Gallery until December 2.

Finally, at MoLI, **Letstryonions** from The Domestic Godless pilots a gustatory approach to textual exploration. Earlier this year, the gastronomic collective served up a feast inspired by the culinary curiosities of Joyce’s book. Kidney burntofferings and liverslicecrackle, anyone? MoLI now screens a video documentation of the project, the James Joyce Classroom, until December 2. ■

See ulysses22.ie