

Magnetic North Theatre Productions

The Dream Train by Tom McGrath

Press reviews 2000



Dream Train ★★★★★

The Tron, Glasgow

JS Bach's *Goldberg Variations* were the inspiration for this play by Tom McGrath and, in the opening scene of this production by Magnetic North, it is Bach's music that first touches the senses as light gradually dawns on the tiered stage.

On the layered set, the characters operate like notes on a musical stave. The voices come in, sometimes in unison as chords, sometimes in counterpoint — always in harmony. The characters appear bewildered, the steps they walk upon are the layers of meaning in the story that is about to unfold. The host of alternative endings that bring the play to a close leave its audience in a state of sublime confusion. This whimsical mood is a departure for McGrath from his usual narrative style.

Dream Train questions reality. The principal

character is an insomniac who cannot tell the difference between reality and his dreams. As the story proceeds, the characters draw the audience into the plot to the extent that we, too, believe that reality no longer matters.

Beautifully directed by Nicholas Bone and well acted by the majority of the cast - Simon Scott as the Baron and Derek McGhie as Chris are excellent but Lynn Edmonstone as Julie seems to struggle — the fact that this is a difficult play to grasp does not detract from its enjoyment. Glimpses of *Oedipus*, *Alice in Wonderland* and even the film, *The Matrix*, are visible through the fog. All in all, *Dream Train* is an original, refreshing piece of work.

On tour: Adam Smith Theatre, Kirkcaldy, tonight; MacRobert Arts Centre, Stirling, tomorrow.

Morag Fleming

The Dream Train, Tron Theatre, Glasgow

Michael Tumelty

LAST night I came out of the opening night of Magnetic North's revival of Tom McGrath's play, *The Dream Train*, feeling a bit like one of the characters. I knew that I'd just watched an enthralling piece of theatre directly inspired by Bach's *Goldberg Variations*. The contrapuntal layering of the four characters — in every conceivable combination — could be observed at a visual and literal level.

And, indeed, taking it at that level, it was intriguing enough.

Is the insomniac Baron a contemporary figure, urging his muse to will him to sleep with Bach's legendary musical soporific? Is he imagining his wife in a brief encounter with a younger man on a train? Is he, in fact, asleep and dreaming? The permutations are deliciously endless. And all the while a recorded performance of the *Goldberg Variations* (Glenn Gould?) threads through the performance.

But, in fact, I didn't emerge as though I'd been watching a play.

I felt as though I had been sucked into a visual representation of the *Goldberg Variations* themselves, magically transformed into language and physical gesture.

Everything was there, every stricken contrapuntal device, metamorphosed into something tangible: imitation, canons, fugues — even the inversions and mirror images.

It genuinely became impossible to distinguish the effect of language from the image of the musical techniques.

Sounds like an intellectual exercise, I know, but, under Nicholas Bone's superb direction, and with splendid performances from Simon Scott, Mary McCusker, Derek McGhie, and the versatile Lynn Edmonstone, it's witty, touching, even macabre at its climax, but, like the great composition itself, eventually coming to rest. I actually felt as though I gained a new insight into music I've known and loved for 40 years.

Can't say better than that.

The Herald Thursday September 28, 2000

The Scotsman, 5 October 2000