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## Tabac Rouge, Sadler's Wells, Review

By **Irene Brown** - Posted on **27 March 2014**



### Show Details

**Company:** Compagnie du Hannebon / James Thiérée A Co-production with Théâtre Vidy Lausanne, Théâtre de la Ville Paris, Le Printemps des Comédiens Montpellier

**Production:** James Thiérée (choreodrama, direction, set design and choreography), Victoria Thiérée (costumes), Sidonei Pigeon (assistant to director), Thomas Delot (sound), Bastien Courthieu (light manager), Richard Haughton (photo)

**Performers:** James Thiérée, Anna Calsina Forrellad, Noémie Ettlin, Namkyung Kim, Matina Kokolaki, Thi Mai Nguyen, Ioulia Plotnikova, Manuel Rodriguez (dancers), Piergiorgio Milano (dancer and acrobat), Katell Le Brenn (contortionist)

**Running time:** 90mins

There is a sense of dark anarchy on the Sadler's Wells stage as the audience awaits the UK Premiere of James Thiérée's latest spectacle, Tabac Rouge. A departure from his past style of magical, playful illusion, this darker production is more dance orientated, without having lost the influence of his circus background.

Black scaffolding, flashing strip lights and hanging wires sit before a dark mirrored backdrop as a haunting falsetto version of Autumn Leaves fills the auditorium. Already the scene is set for the strange marrying of the unexpected.

Tabac Rouge defies definition. Is this red tobacco a hallucinogenic and this logic defying spectacle of supreme physicality and boundless imagination its result? Who is the ash-covered beneficent master behind this nether world of pulleys, junk shop piano innards, castors and sewing machines where words and sounds wait to be married to gestures?

It is pretty useless to impose a meaning as surprise and the unexpected are Thiérée signatures. Better to accept the brilliance of the supreme talent that has produced it. It is a mysterious dream of sublime subversion that might just be looking at the relationship of man and mechanics. But who knows?

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The dancers are nothing short of miraculous; one minute they are staccato clockwork automaton, the next they are writhing and morphing to monster slugs and insects. They have outstanding individual talent yet have the capacity to become as one. And how brave for one to enter the audience with such raw vulnerability!

Manuel Rodriguez, who has a terrific comic presence, has to have been born with elastic limbs. The juxtaposition of sounds and actions as he smokes and blows out of the house lights is a simply fantastic springboard to the unique and fierce animation in which the audience is about to be immersed. The veiled needlewoman who haunts the piece like a wheeling standard lamp is a counterpoint to the dust covered utilitarian suits, all created by Victoria Thiérrée.

Background music as diverse as Ave Maria and cool Cuban rhythms, along with quiet brass, harmonica, gentle hurdy-gurdy sounds and brooding cello notes are all part of the theme of incongruous marriage of sounds and actions. The sound motif of a stuck gramophone needle is eerie and strangely apt.

At one point, the seemingly infinite stage is stripped bare by its performers. Chaos and menace ensue as a wild and perilous dismantling takes place with the giant silvered mirrors slicing the stage against an altar of noise.

James Thiérrée has created a grand and virtually silent opera that is a sublime manifestation of ideas and mystifying sounds. While never capitalizing on the Chaplin legacy, he has clearly inherited the compact elegance of his grandfather whose talent for poignant mime was laden with comedy and human sympathy. His acute awareness of actions and gestures continues in the genes of his grandson, James Thiérrée, whose presence on stage has a joyously modest grandeur.

James Thiérrée made his stage debut aged four in 1978, appearing alongside his older sister, Aurélie in *Le Cirque Imaginaire*, run by their parents Victoria Chaplin and Jean-Baptiste Thiérrée. He toured with the circus throughout his childhood and teenage years and in 1998 formed *Compagnie du Hannebon*, an informal international ensemble that includes both circus and dance artists. His recent productions include *La Veillée des Abysses* (2005), *Au Revoir Parapluie* (2007) and *Raoul* (2009). Maybe one day, James Thiérrée will bring one of his extraordinary shows to Scotland. Cometh the day...

#### **Show times**

[Sadler's Wells](#): 25 - 29 March 2014, 7.30pm

#### **Tickets**

£12 - £38

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