

Diederik Peeters: Red Herring

[The Basement](#), Brighton

21ST MARCH 2013 | 21ST MARCH 2013



Dorothy Max Prior

[website](#) | [twitter](#) | [rss](#)



The show starts – or does it? A figure with a sheet of white paper for a face appears from the very back of the deep performance space, walking slowly, an animated Magritte painting. He's here to open the show; he would sing, but... But no, that was a red herring; in a flash the man re-emerges (minus the sheet of white paper) from a half-open doorway, a rapid lighting change transforming the space into a film noir set. Unmasked, pushing his lank hair behind his ears, Belgian artist/performer Diederik Peeters tells us in a slightly agitated, conspiratorial tone that this is the real start of the show. And so we begin, and begin, and begin. And so it goes.

The theatrical conceit is that everything is a red herring – there is no start, and no ending either, and what happens in between (the start and end of the show; the start and end of life) is a wild and random assortment of stimuli that juggle for our attention constantly. Where does life, never mind art, begin and end when so much that happens exists in parallel time; when time itself is at the mercy of memory and imagination and the games they play with our perception; when so much random *stuff* bombards our senses night and day?



In the onstage world he creates so ingeniously life is a roomful of projectors running numerous films simultaneously. He sets up a game of rewinds and replays, of fanciful experiments and artful ‘mistakes’ – and of course the truth is that whilst playing with the notion of chaos theory, playing with the various realities and fictions of performance, film, radio, and indeed life itself, what we witness is something breathtakingly beautiful in its structure, and in the interplay of its aural, visual and physical elements.

Some moments are worthy of Buster Keaton: standing behind a dislodged door, just his hands showing (that image itself another gorgeous sculptural moment), he suddenly clambers up the door, which crashes over, bringing him almost crashing into the front row. At other points, he turns into an onstage Foley artist, creating a sound drama loaded with suspense – shoes crunch on gravel, the wind howls, a door creaks (doors feature a lot in this show). Later the drama is replayed in physical action, in tandem with the soundtrack that we’ve seen and heard being created. At other points he teasingly invites us to close our eyes: ‘DON’T think of the beach!’ he cries as we hear a soundtrack of crashing waves. Throughout the piece, things seen and heard are re-viewed/re-experienced with a twist. Constantly we ask ourselves: what did we see, what did we hear, what did we think, what really happened? What exactly is ‘reality’?

Diederik Peeters’ influences are worn on his sleeve: silent comedy, horror and suspense film, and the early 20th century art traditions of surrealism and absurdism. His years of experience both as a visual artist and as a performer with Jan Fabre and with Alan Platel have paved the way for the creation of solo work of the highest order. I say solo work, but there is a strong team behind the main player: the work of sound artist and technician Lieven Dousselaere is fantastic. Set design, lighting, dramaturgy – all contributes to one harmonious whole.

Red Herring is that wonderful and rare achievement: a show that is both pure entertainment and pure art, the two co-existing in a structured chaos controlled by a masterful performer. Proof (if any more were needed) that Belgium is currently a hotbed of top quality contemporary performance. A perfect choice to open The Basement’s spring season – a season that sees a number of excellent European shows brought to the UK over the coming weeks.