

THE SECRET PROJECT – Firkin Crane, Cork

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If the stage which was filled with motion sensors was a haunted space, as suggested by the programme notes for *The Secret Project*, then the ghosts were of the benevolent kind rather than a scary post Halloween ghoul. On Thursday at the Firkin Crane, performers Jools Gilson-Ellis, Mary Nunan and Cindy Cummings, along with digital artist and composer Richard Povall created on the bare stage a rich world of text, movement and video images.

Any magic that happened came not from hi-tech gimmicks, but from the performers and Jools Gilson-Ellis's beautiful text. This brought us into a magic-realistic world of snow-ghosts who trip you when you walk in the snow, or words that themselves fall. Similarly, all of the senses were stimulated not through a barrage of sound and images, but by, for example, allowing us sit in darkness; just listening to text, the odd light occasionally brightening to reveal a dancer in a pose, like an apparition.

Merging live spoken text and recorded fragments triggered by the movement of the dancers provided an ever-changing texture to the movement, the spoken text complete with breath and gasps, like an improvised solo over the bass n' drums of the recorded snippets. The interaction with the technology was ever-changing but not relentless, and because the dancers themselves were in control of their sound world there was a real feeling of witnessing a work that lived and breathed.

Although ostensibly concerned with secrets, *The Secret Project* for me evoked awakenings: the sexual awakenings of the girl-child in the text or the awakening of all the senses, not just sight and hearing, but the tactile sense such as when Mary Nunan let rice slip through her fingers as she talked.

The performance had a couple of lumpy moments but these did not unsettle the magic, and when the snow fell at the end, albeit in the form of rice, it seemed as though it happened because we all collectively wished for it.