

Razor sharp

Playful, muscular and daring, Ockham's Razor marries beauty and wit. Aerialist Charlotte Mooney cuts to the chase with **Tamzin Lewis**.

It's nice to think that 14th Century Franciscan friar William of Ockham would give his blessing to the ingenious aerialists keeping alive his Razor theory. William was a bit of a forward-thinking firebrand, excommunicated by the Pope over his controversial views. He was also a philosophical hero, who proposed that if there is a choice between two plausible theories – the simplest is usually the best.

Ockham's Razor may be an eccentric name for an aerial theatre company but it was the only one which stuck after months of head-scratching. And Ockham's ideas of parsimony are reflected in apparently simple sets and storylines which belie complex and perilous-looking choreography.

Asked about the hazards of dangling in the air, Charlotte Mooney says: "When we start rehearsing we are at a very low height and use crash mats. Then we gradually build it up over time.

Aerialists are pretty slavish about removing risk. By the time we take away the crash mats and come to perform it is not dangerous at all as we have rehearsed it so many times."

She adds: "However, things can happen... something out of the ordinary like a faint."

Sudden faints apart, Charlotte describes the danger of hanging by the fingertips as "perceived risk, rather than real risk." She says: "As an audience it is only enjoyable to watch if aerialists are playing with risk and may look vulnerable, but are in control. When you see someone who is not in control it is really unpleasant."

After wowing Dance City audiences last year with ingenious show *The Mill*, Ockham's Razor have been invited back with a triple bill: *Arc*, *Momento Mori* and *Every Action*...

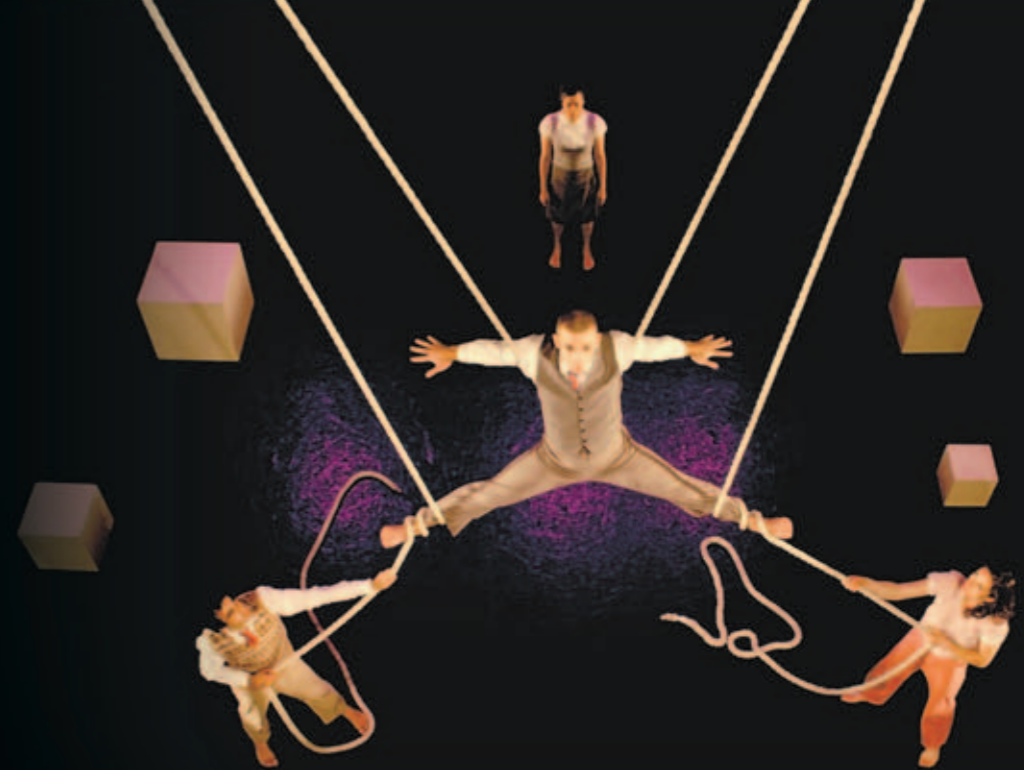
The morbid-sounding *Momento Mori* (Latin for Remember you will die) was the first dance piece Charlotte made with Alex Harvey, her now husband, after graduating from the Academy of Circus Arts in Bristol. The dance is influenced by Hans Holbein's *Dance of Death* published in 1538 and featuring woodcuts of people being danced to their graves.

Charlotte explains: "When we were making the piece, there were a lot of images coming up about rest, support or fleeing from fighting. They were archetypal images and they reminded me of something.

"I had come across Holbein's woodcuts doing my English Literature degree and when I saw them again, I realised what we were working on was like a narrative of



Woodcarving by Hans Holbein depicting the Black Death



Ockham's Razor's *Every Action* and *Momento Mori* with Alex Harvey and Charlotte Mooney

someone's relationship with death throughout their life. It starts with something you are completely oblivious to as a child. Then you become more aware of it and it is something you may flee from, fight against or even flirt with. Ultimately death could be a comfort and, of course, an inevitability. The idea is to use physical images to tell that story."

Although she assures me *Momento Mori* is beautiful rather than dark, the piece is countered by the much lighter *Every Action*... derived from Isaac Newton's Third Law of Motion.

"The equipment we use for this is a long piece of rope attached to two pulleys," Charlotte says. "If you pull one side of the rope the other side will go up. Essentially *Every Action*... is about relationships between people involving their status and ego with some one-upmanship. It is very playful and a bit silly."

Third in the bill is *Arc*, which is set on a metal grid floating in space like a raft.

Charlotte says: "*Arc* is the story of three people stranded and what happens in their relationship. Two's company and three's a crowd, so this looks at the dynamics and difficulties of three.

"As their relationship deteriorates, the raft itself begins to break and fall apart. How will the three of them cope? Will it all be destroyed or can they resolve it and work together to make it stable again?"

It all sounds quite cerebral, but strip away all the layers and Ockham's Razor are experts at creating remarkable physical theatre.

Charlotte says: "You can just see what we do as people swinging through the air. There is a level at which it is visual and exciting, big and dangerous.

"It is tough as we have to be aerobically fit and also be able to use all our muscles. In between gigs we are mostly eating large amounts of carbohydrate and sitting to recover."

* Ockham's Razor perform at Dance City on September 30-October 1. For tickets call 0191 261 0505 or visit www.dancecity.co.uk