

Beauty in pursuit of perfection

DANCE

In Glass

Choreography by Narelle Benjamin for Spring Dance.

Studio, Sydney Opera House, September 7.

I'd gladly watch Paul White and Kristina Chan do the dance equivalent of reading the telephone book. Taking a Sunday afternoon stroll perhaps? It's as if an electric current runs beneath their skin, making them hyper-aware of not just their bodies but the atmosphere around them, which they charge and alter simply by being in it. Narelle Benjamin's *In Glass* is perfectly in tune with this quality, much more so than in other recent works of hers.

There are few things more satisfying than seeing performer and work completely at one with each other, and you get it here. That's not to say *In Glass* is perfect: it is only 55 minutes long but has plumbed all its themes fully in perhaps 40 minutes and rather peters out. The material itself isn't inferior; it's just not necessary, so in that odd alchemy of theatre, something that in isolation would look just fine slightly diminishes the work as a whole. Dance is such a concentrated form it often doesn't take long to give audiences a profound experience.

In Glass exists in an otherworldly place of reflections, displacements, opposites, doubles and shadows. Samuel James's elegantly simple design provides a set of movable screens and ovals that reveal Chan and White in various guises: in mirror image, in dreamlike film sequences, as fractured, multiplied or transformed figures, or swallowed up.

Enveloped by Huey Benjamin's subtle and evocative soundscape, Chan and White bring sweep and grandeur to the choreography while being alive to every intricacy and nuance. As usual Benjamin uses a great deal of yoga-based movement, but here it is much less arid and studied than it can be. The feeling of perpetual motion as Chan and White fold, extend, ripple and spiral is mesmerizing and the close partnering work is outstanding: intimate, almost impossibly fluid and emotionally engaging.

White is credited, as he is with Meryl Tankard's *Oracle*, as having developed the work with the choreographer. His talents are considerable, to say the least. I wrote last year that he was the best male dancer in the country. I still hold to that, and in Chan he has the perfect partner. If Benjamin could bear to edit the writer's dictum "kill your darlings" comes to mind she would have a brilliant work.

DEBORAH JONES