

# FRANKENSTEIN

The Gym, The Arts Centre, Worcester Boulevard, Christchurch  
17/06/2016 - 02/07/2016

► Production Details



## **Intriguing pageant of ideas and theatrical wizardry**

Review by [Lindsay Clark](#) 19th Jun 2016

Mary Shelley's nightmare of 16 June 1816 spawned more than a Gothic classic about the well intentioned doctor and his

troubled nameless humanoid. The story itself, of course, was predated by many a tale. It has the deep fascination of fable

and metaphor, never more so than in our own age where the creation and shaping of life already turn yesterday's fiction into today's fact.

It is a given that Free Theatre's treatment of the story will be startling in the best sense. This production from Peter Falkenberg's experimental theatre company is to be the last in the current venue and whereas the creative drive of this outfit will see it flourish anywhere, the lofty space of The Gym works particularly well for sets and lighting such as Stuart Lloyd-Harris has provided this time for a sixth generation Dr Frankenstein's laboratory. It is a replica of his Antarctic workspace, safe and isolated from contemporary goings on.

We step into a misty world of crystalline white that crunches underfoot with a cascade of the same material falling on a circle of semi prostrate figures producing something between a chant and a hum. On a high ledge is a pale, roped, giant figure who turns out to be Prometheus. He also seems to be the source of sound, creating a sense of impending action and underscoring its meaning.

All this is at once engaging and puzzling, a circumstance which makes the comfortably ordinary appearance of George Parker as the good doctor himself all the more significant. Now we are cheerfully informed of the fund raising function of the occasion, including a tongue in cheek explanation of the how and why that have led this descendant of the original 'visionary' to 'innovative' Christchurch. Projected images and film illustrate his spiel and although this introduction to the real business seems a little drawn out, at about twenty minutes, it

does settle us down and confirm that we are to witness the results of his ceaseless striving to create a better version of man, indeed to change the world for the better.

Thus, called up one by one for our inspection, is a wondrously assorted bunch of prototypes, marking the development of Frankenstein's work. The ultimate creation must be resilient and free of the problems arising from gender. Moreover song and dance rather than bookishness will be favoured. Science and art will blend in these bodies.

All are effectively conceived and presented with enjoyable and convincing strangeness, many 'hatching' from suspended pods. But first in line is Igor, the earliest experiment, now, a general gofer. He is able to upload and spout literature and gives us a heady taste of Milton as a demo. Then it is the turn of the male-female Bearded Lady, creator of puppet babies on a platform, unfortunately angled for me to see clearly. Pandora with her fabled box is next, followed by a wonderfully aerobic Ariel, magnificent Tiki, The Fly, hatched prematurely, Echoes, Oceanides and Prometheus himself. The spell of otherness is on us in a concentrated dose.

Particle physics and neuro science and an extensive range of textual references have their mention, but it is the hypnotic rhythm of a song of exhortation from Dr Frankenstein, hair down now, and dance from the assembled prototypes that seals the event. We are at a crossroads it seems, at the embryo stage ourselves.