

NÔT

MARLENE MONTEIRO FREITAS

Night Terrors



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In an unnamed space, carpeted in night blue and sectioned by wire walls, eight multi-talented performers parade a plethora of characters. From babies to handmaidens, from pious priests to maniacal court jesters, from bloodied virgins and mad cooks to marionette-like midgets, they morph before our eyes. 'NÔT', by Cape Verdean, Lisbon-based choreographer Marlene Monteiro Freitas, is a surreal, hellish nightmare from which you do not care to wake.

16 MEI 2026

‘NÔT’ — 'night' in Cape Verdean Creole — is inspired by the mythical book of fables ‘One Thousand and One Nights’ and by the many critical texts it has inspired. In the programme, Monteiro Freitas cites a lecture by Jorge Luis Borges, the Argentine poet, essayist, and short-story writer who saw the work as a symbol of the power of infinite and labyrinthine storytelling. But those looking for a literal transposition of the opus, also known as ‘Arabian Nights’, will be disappointed. ‘NÔT’ is a ninety-minute moving fresco, its threads knotting together horror and hilarity, chaos and systemisation, the outlandish and the strangely familiar.

Aladdin’s-lamp

The notion of nighttime — and therefore dreams — is already suggested by the hard, flat table-top beds laid out in regimented dormitory style throughout the space. We could be in a hospital, a nursery, military barracks, or later, as the action unfolds, a bloody abattoir or kitchen. The space metamorphoses literally in a puff of Aladdin’s-lamp-like smoke that periodically billows from the wings.

The rousing rhythms of three live snare drums are a sonic constant throughout, whether the overlaid recorded soundtrack be Igor Stravinsky, Gustav Mahler, or Nick Cave. The three drumstick-wielding performers likewise transmute from fanfare to folk group, military orchestra to rock band.

Meanwhile, the other performers, with Freitas’ signature unrelenting cadence and mechanical movements, are at one moment defecating, slurping, or seeping menstrual blood, while in the next they are washing, scrubbing, rubbing, or percussively thwacking wet fabric against the ground, perhaps underscoring the true violence of 'cleanliness'. Sudden piercing screeches of torture or muted orgasmic sighs punctuate pauses in the soundscape, eliciting deeply visceral reactions.

We absorb all these scenes simultaneously, without questioning their logic or incongruity.

The performers frequently don and discard silicone masks resembling filter-faced Barbie dolls still wearing compression bandages after plastic surgery. They slither from 'purity' to 'deformity', the latter proving less terrifying than the former.

A crazed, enraged, cathartic carnival

On one side of the stage, three 'domestics' regimentally unfurl the beds’ covers to reveal the blood-stained undersheets of a *nuit des noces*; they then meticulously fold the top sheets, ritualistically placing them on the floor like bundles containing discarded dead babies. In the centre of the space, performer Mariana Tembe, perched on a chair, continues a crazed, enraged, cathartic carnival dance, swirling and curling her knotted cloth legs in what seems both protest and celebration. On the other side of the space, green-eyelidded, long-limbed dancer Joãozinho da Costa greets us with a languorous, Rocky-Horror-style “bon soirrrr”. As in dreams — or as if we possessed an insect’s compound-eye vision — we absorb all these scenes simultaneously, without questioning their logic or incongruity.

The rigorous displaying and layering of minutely controlled bedlam, the merging of human and monstrous within the stylised beauty of the sets, Freitas’ emblematic movement vocabulary — figures stiffly shuffling in rhythmic unison, repeating everyday gestures with mesmerising precision — all allow the abstract

and the actual to meld. Herein lies the allure of Monteiro Freitas' theatre.

And as in the most memorable of dreams, in 'NÔT' the symbolic, archaic, and metaphoric break through to intrigue and baffle us, leaving behind a residue of unease that, after a joyous standing ovation, each of us takes home to ponder at length.