

# Common Dissonance



By Alex Bailey Dillon | © 14th Aug 2023 | ★★★★★



Not all circus is dance, but Na Djinang Circus' *Common Dissonance* certainly is. The opening sequence of tumbling and acrobatics appears shockingly effortless. It's a difficult illusion to achieve in any circus, where the realities of breath, momentum, and weight are unavoidable and the convention of visually or audibly checking in with castmates is well established. In this case, however, Jessica Connell and Johnathon Brown appear like extensions of each other, perfectly aware of where they are, were, and will be, ready to take each other's weight without perceptible preparation, effort, or delay. The constant motion, encompassing all of House of Oz's relatively small stage, is positively hypnotic.



The constant motion is positively hypnotic

In addition to the beautiful acrobatics throughout the show by Connell, Brown, and Harley Mann, *Common Dissonance* also featured some of the best diabolo juggling and hula hooping I have ever seen. Mann's diabolo routine was creative, funny, and collaborative in a way that a typically solo apparatus rarely is. Above all – it was *surprising*, from the first moments to the last. Connell's hula hooping was unusually dynamic and her isolation in harsh lighting and metallic hoops was an early tell of the deeper themes of the show.

It's typical for a circus show to have a chalk bucket somewhere onstage, for performers to use to dry their hands and improve their grip. I have never seen a bowl of water on stage before. Mann and Brown, who are Wakka Wakka and Anawan/Kamilaroi respectively, use the water to mix traditional ochre pigments used by indigenous Australians and paint themselves and the back of the stage. Connell, who is not indigenous, has a more complicated relationship with the pigments that was emotionally impactful if not entirely legible to this reviewer, someone with extremely minimal knowledge of indigenous Australian cultures. Regardless, the impact of all three performances – the ways they intertwined and diverged – was magnificent.

Perhaps it was the small house, perhaps the intensity of the performances or the weight of meaning clearly ascribed to them, perhaps the unexpected dancerly quality of the piece, but *Common Dissonance* was the sort of circus that elicits more hushed wows wafting up from the audience than raucous applause at the end of an act. The show is all the better for it.