

## Review of *And You Held Me*

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Devised, choreographed and directed by Claire Henderson Davis, this is a liturgy, very much the work of the eight women offering it, involving song, music, dance and spoken word. Each person contributes her own sense of self and method of self-expression, but the whole is much more than the sum of the parts and this is a tribute to Claire's imaginative direction.

The piece was put together for Mothering Sunday but carries none of the conventional sentimentality associated with that occasion. Rather it is an exploration of the nature of contemporary life and the struggle of human beings – in this instance women – to explore the meaning embedded in the complexities, banalities and richness of their own lives. In parts it is very specific to the experience of women and addresses powerfully the issue of where our sense of identity originates.

The cumulative effect is of a multi-layered piece offering humour, beauty, pathos, angst and energy. Those watching almost inevitably recognise references to the circumstances of their own life and being. It is a piece which resonates, not always comfortably, but always intelligently.

Claire is a dancer of significant talent whose theological understanding and knowledge of the human psyche work in creative synergy with her artistic gifts. Those gifts include a keen perception of visual impact and a deep appreciation of words.

This piece therefore includes words of scripture concerning Jesus' life and death set alongside extracts from textbooks of psychotherapy. The resulting insights into the Gospel story are quite startling. Church music and contemporary sounds are present, and in one instance the women all sing together a haunting and disturbing 'drone'. The shipping news is featured, the energy of dance evokes the freedom and zest of childhood gradually evolving into an awakening to the presence of others in the world whose intentions towards us may or may not be friendly.

As a liturgical experience *And You Held Me* is unorthodox, brave and provocative. It is always thoughtful, at times disturbing, and ultimately profoundly moving. In liturgical and performance terms Henderson Davis's work is innovative and refreshing. I look forward to further experiences of it.

**- Rosemary Lain-Priestley**