Breath Cycle on Stage: A Story of Healing – Tron Theatre, Glasgow
Reviewer: Lauren Humphreys
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★★★★

Writer: Martin O'Connor
Composer: Gareth Williams
Director: Martin O'Connor

Scottish Opera's Breath Cycle on Stage unites opera singers, writers and composers to collaborate with those living with Long COVID and other respiratory conditions. Initially meeting online, the participants gathered weekly to learn singing and breath techniques to improve their health. In addition to this, the group members learned song writing, and found opportunities to connect and share their often common, lived experiences. Featuring opera singer David Douglas, actress and singer Frances Thorburn and Admiral Fallow's Louis Abbott. Breath Cycle is the showcase of the songs that emerged from the classes, bringing this online work to the live stage.

Every lyric comprises the words of its participants and every member of the project has had some of their words included into the songs. Lyricist Martin O'Connor has skilfully woven these words to perfectly compliment composer Gareth Williams music. There are elements of traditional, contemporary and classical sounds throughout.

The song cycle takes us on a journey from the literal loss of our voice, the thing that we use to tell the world who we are, what we think and feel, through the highs and lows of the slow road to recovery.

The three main vocalists are superbly talented. David Douglas has the most beautifully toned voice and the songs soar in his hands. The always impressive Frances Thorburn gets to showcase her crystal clear vocals as well as her acting skills and Louis Abbott provides a contemporary contrast to these two singing stars.

Breath Cycle is an eye-opening glimpse into the long denied but very real and complex condition Long COVID. These are stories heavily laced with loss and poignancy, it's raw, emotive and tugs at the heart-strings. There are shows of resilience and hope here too, but the air hangs heavy at the end from the emotional roller coaster ride we have been taken on.

Over all an ambitious and worthwhile endeavour from Scottish Opera.