



## REVIEW Amsterdam Fringe Festival 2011

### Vilein



**Genre:** Cabaret and Burlesque

**Venue:** Club Up, De Kring

Reviewed by Miles Philip Niemeijer 5 September 2011

### Low Down

LUDIQUÉ! is the upgraded diva version of the artist Gerald Drent, in collaboration with his partner Martijn Mulders. A year after his acclaimed Fringe performance “Beziel / From the Soul”, his second creation in this new persona is “Vilein / Vicious” – a contemporary version of a dark contemplative fairy-tale. Vilein explores such themes as love, desire, and traditional values and challenges our perception of the queer and bizarre. To construct this collective show, LUDIQUÉ! links together words, sound, song and movement. Vilein is a deeply personal exploration of the sacrifices which need to be accepted if dreams are to become reality.

### Review

A red satin curtain valance against a backdrop of a well-stocked bar and throbbing beats that fill the room. Club Up – the Amsterdam nightclub notorious for its extravagant parties – provides the ideal setting for night-time antics of the LUDIQUÉ! theatre troupe. Two male divas appear; one scantily clad, the other dressed as nocturnal royalty, a case of Count Dracula meets David Bowie. The latter helped in and out of his garments by the other, clearly has the upper hand. He is LUDIQUÉ!, the shows protagonist, the androgynous queen of the night, presently confined by the walls of the theatre.

The duo starts to sing to a dance-oriented musical rhythm that sounds like a hybrid of electronica and vintage porn groove. We are gradually drawn into a magical world filled with odd twists and turns moving into the bizarre. A collage of interconnected stories told through classic burlesque *Kit Kat Club*-esque musical numbers, a dark fairy tale reading, duets, monologues and performed in various languages. LUDIQUÉ! investigates the impact of love on a seemingly loveless, narcissistic creature. How do the absence of true love and the abundance of meaningless desire affect someone who is already considered extraordinary? As the show’s title implies, the protagonists continuously reveals his vicious side yet does it in a playful, lively way. LUDIQUÉ! is a dark frolicsome hero who proclaims himself *homme fatale* “half man – half beast”. His outrageous songs are followed by hollow laughter and histrionic, over-the-top, fairy tale storytelling.

However, LUDIQUÉ! aims to show there is always “beauty underneath darkness”, and his sagging confidence becomes more and more apparent towards the end of the play, when the invulnerable “man-beast” falls to his knees and appeals to his childhood dreams of love and affection. It is a reminder to the audience that underneath the vicious outward appearance, we are often able to discern a certain fragility, if you look hard enough. The powerful final monologue encapsulates most of the complexities of being regarded as “different” in connection with the persistent human need for love.

However disengaging the Gothic appearance and curious songs of LUDIQUÉ! may occasionally be, the execution of this is an innovative and virtually flawless take on the classic burlesque, in a contemporary setting. The variety of intermittent music fragments serves the pace of the performance well, and the strong stage presence of both actors is absorbing to watch. LUDIQUÉ!’s message is universal: we cannot survive without the affection of others. This is an extraordinary raw-edged performance, which explores the boundaries of the ordinary and the absurd, and unravels into a glittering vaudeville show. No run-of-the-mill production, but a twisted fairy-tale with comic qualities, Vilein is an unsettling play about an unsettling fact, and the impossibility of conveying the theme of ‘love’ results in very engaging theatre.