The Toad Knew at Lowry Theatre
Reviewed by Matthew Dougall May 2017

A highly original and creative spectacle which sees six talented performers inhabit a dark and sinister, perhaps subterranean, world where the boundary between animal and human is unclear. Their purpose is seemingly to create pure light from a looming, omnipresent, ominous but excellently constructed set of lights hanging down from the stage, all interconnected and all seemingly with a life of their own. It could be said that once these come together it represents a

giant heart that beats for all of their 'kind', or maybe it is an all-seeing eye that they need to worship.

If I am honest, then there are several stories; all of which intertwine, within this 100 minute non-stop roundelay, and I think every audience member will come away from the evening with a different insight and impression, with their own version of the story that has unfolded before them. I think that that was the company's intention.

Using physical theatre, dance, song, slapstick and circus skills all to excellent effect, this company of 6 inhabit this stage and their world with accomplished ease, and yet we know that it takes years of practice to make some of those moves look graceful and simple.

Presented by Crying Out Loud, this is James Thierree's award-winning Compagnie Du Hanneton in their latest creation. It is fantastical, inventive, highly humorous, and also a little bit creepy, and by the end of it you do have the feeling that you have just witnessed something really quite unique and rather special.

James Thierree has not only created and directed this piece, but he is also the central character within it, and further (proving that his Chaplin heritage is still alive and kicking) composed the original music for it too. Seemingly his physicality and talent know no bounds.

Working alongside him in this piece are the no lesser talents of Sonia Bel Hadj Brahim, Ofelie Crispin, Samuel Dulertre, Herve Lassince, and Thi Mai Nguyen, and as they all negotiate a large pool of frothing water, a piano with a life of its own, a strange device looking more like a post-apocalyptic piece of artillery, and these incredibly designed lights, this bizarre and child-like drama unfolds, as if in a dream. I am still uncertain as to who or which was the toad, I kept changing my opinion on this; and moreover, what did the toad know that the others didn't... well, the jury is still out on that one... but it was indeed extremely enjoyable and I felt quite privileged to have had the opportunity of watching it.

I cannot finish this review though without crediting those who made this set so fantastical. Sound by Thomas Delot, lighting by Alex Hardellet and James Thierree, visual creations by Victoria Thierree, and technical coordination Anthony Nicholas.