

L'Immédiat – review, The Guardian

Barbican, London

[Lyn Gardner](#) , Friday 20 January 2012 15.35 GMT



Heroic failings ... L'Immédiat. Photograph: Tristram Kenton for the Guardian

Have you ever had the feeling that the world is falling down around your ears? It is, quite literally, for the performers in this remarkable piece of French acrobatic theatre that is as much philosophy in motion as circus show.

All the world's a stage, and this one resembles a vast junkyard as it begins with an extraordinary sustained slapstick sequence, in which the universe collapses under the weight of so much rubbish. Ironing boards turn malicious and fold up, walls fall, even the flowers droop in vases and pages fall out of books that are being read.

Nothing is ever quite as funny as that opening scene. But the show retains its strong farcical bent and running gags, even as it becomes progressively darker and bleaker, and all around, the lights flicker and the theatre begins to creak as if the whole place has been invaded by a poltergeist and may imminently crack apart. Beams of light swivel like searchlights; there are distant sounds of catastrophes and air-raid warnings.

Amid all this, the performers carry on like actors in a bad farce who know that the show must go on whatever happens. They will not be beaten; they are heroic in their repeated failings. A man endlessly reaches for a glass of water like a desert traveller dying of thirst glimpsing the mirage of an oasis; a woman sinks to the floor, an agony of appeal in her eyes, and is simply swept away by a giant broom. By the end, the stage is piled high with a teetering mountain of debris. But there is nothing at all rubbish about this show.