

Hallo - Martin Zimmermann, the incredible geometry man

Few shows have the audience smiling before the cast are even on stage. But Martin Zimmermann manages it in his (nearly) solo show Hallo.

Boxes on stage have a life of their own as the wiry performer inhabits the set and animates his surroundings. Every prop is reconfigurable, reusable and can be reappear or disappear in an unexpected way. Nothing is at it seems. The show is totally full of surprises.

Panels slide magically across the stage. Zimmermann jumps in and out of doors, one time agitated, the next laughing manically. For a minute or two we stare in wonder at an enormous moving parallelogram, admiring the shapes of light thrown onto the shifting scene as the performer clammers over it.

Muttering along with the odd "Hallo" are accompanied by piano music that adds shade and emotion to the performance.

The motorisation is invisible, the level of control is exact. The delight of Hallo is the precision with which 'accidents' have been planned to happen as parts of the staging are 'damaged' and one scene transforms into the next. The attention to detail is extraordinary. It feels like the performance is made up on the hoof ... yet it's planned to within an inch of its life. Even the appearance of the stage hand (Roger Studer) introduces mystery and humour as this invisible character develops its personality and confidence on stage.

Hallo is beautiful and the most unexpected highlight of the festival. Both performances at Belfast International Arts Festival are now over, but if you ever have the chance to see Hallo or Martin Zimmermann, drive long and far to see a show.