

**THEATRE**  
**BLUEBEARD**

TRAMWAY, GLASGOW

★★★★

WHO'D have thought a bare stage with a wooden cube could be so endlessly fascinating? But using just these simple elements, Netherlands-based multimedia artists 33 1/3 Collective might just have forged a new form of theatre – with a little help from some clever computer projections.

*Bluebeard*, part of Glasgow's Sonica festival of sonic arts, is a visually mesmerising rethinking of Bartók's opera *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* that conveys the tale of the sinister Duke's new wife Judith and her compulsive search for the fate of his former lovers through striking projected images that cover both stage and cube – which spins, shrinks and seems to float thanks to the visual trickery. Mysterious figures

bring on stretchers to remove an endless supply of bodies; a goose oversees a revolution from atop a filing-cabinet skyscraper; and a shower of coins rains from the sky.

There's no denying the power and strange beauty of *Bluebeard's* images, with doors opening to reveal a torture chamber full of severed limbs, the Duke's glittering treasure and his endless realms. The pre-recorded soundtrack is a bit on the generic side, mixing spiky jazz with quite a lot of squeaks and grunts that sound like they've come straight out of a horror B-movie.

In the end, it's easier to be impressed by the artists' astonishing technical achievements than truly moved by the piece's themes. Fascinating it may be, but for a story with such emotional resonance, *Bluebeard* is curiously uninvolving.

**DAVID KETTLE**