

Theatre review: Heka from Gandini Juggling at The Place

[Vera Liber](#) 30 January

Sean Gandini & Kati Ylä-Hokkala supported by Mime London

Gandini Juggling

The Place

–1 February 2025

Sean Gandini, co-director with Kati Ylä-Hokkala (whom he vaguely remembers is his wife) of Gandini Juggling, as well as being droll, makes for a charming host, master of ceremonies, wit and philosopher. He has an inquisitive mind, which he shares with us in their latest production, *Heka* (the Egyptian goddess of magic), apparently the company's first new show for three years—I wonder if the idea for *Heka* was triggered by their participation in Philip Glass's opera [Akhnaten](#)...

An entertaining and mesmerising hour passes in a flash of trompe l'oeil, sleight of hand (hands that make me think of Buñuel), distractions and revelations (sort of) of how it's done. Add to that their usual fabulous (in every sense) juggling, Gandini's balletic choreography and Andy Cowton's sound landscape of percussive beats and samples, Charles Aznavour amongst them, and it is a (tautologically) magical evening, a little obscured by Guy Hoare's crepuscular lighting.

"Embracing elements of contemporary choreography, it reimagines magic using repetition, counterpoint and misdirection and explores the dynamics of group magic, probing the possibilities of multiple hands and gestures and delving into the nuances of delay and anticipation."

Many hands make light work of disappearing and reappearing balls and disassembling limbs... And if you think you can see how it's being done, all

the better; the whimsical humour of the endeavour is the point. The people behind me guffaw with laughter all the way through. Balls and red string appear from bodily orifices and disappear the same way.

There's three-legged juggling and *explication de texte* (red herrings, etc...) so to speak—Gandini is a master at that. Many languages are spoken: the languages of the international performers Kate Boschetti, Tedros Girmaye, Doreen Grossman, Jose Triguero, Yu-Hsien Wu and Kati Ylä-Hokkala. And we learn a few words—the Finnish for 'balderdash' (if we're not being hoodwinked). That's magical, too.

The confined intimate space, the black box of The Place, suits them well, though they have played [larger venues](#). The only thing I find uncomfortable is the blinding light (Hoare has many tricks of the light up his sleeves) directed at the audience as scenes are changed, but in the end, all is revealed; the black gauze that conceals is such a simple stage trick but it works. Gandini warmly welcomes us to his world.

He says he has been called several things including The Great Gandini—I'll go along with that. Mathematical / geometrical precision is another of his strengths. It has to be. And diverting tall tales. He quotes the nineteenth century magician and illusionist Robert-Houdin about the philosophy of magic. You can almost see his brain pinging like a pinball machine. The group juggles as they repeat these phrases.

And, as they throw different-sized, white on one side coloured on the other, rings, I see the circular paintings of Sonia and Robert Delaunay and a touch of Oskar Schlemmer's *Triadisches Ballett*. Halos, too. Their promotional literature says, "everything is not as it seems...". That we know, but Gandini Juggling "inspired by magic, surrealism and the choreography of illusion" in turn must hope to inspire us. It is sold out. But have no fears, this must-see show is touring the UK till 3 June.

Magicians Yann Frisch (France) and Kalle Nio (Finland) worked as magic

consultants on the show.