

HAMISH HAMILTON

THE SCOTSMAN

Elemental themes of birth, death and resurrection - all the blossoms on the tree of human pain - are interwoven in the complex hour-long ceremonial presented this week by the Ritual Theatre. These actors and musicians, and their director, Barry Edwards, are members of an avant-garde group whose 'controlled improvisation' re-created nightly at the Edinburgh Festival, adds up to an astounding, an electrifying experience.

Here, as in the People Show piece about 'Bird' and man's wish to fly, we have genuine evidence that urban man is finding his way back - in spite of all kinds and degrees of wounding alienation - to ancestral and still viable folk forms. The three musicians (Clive Bell on flute, Radu Malfati on trombone, William Currie on viola) construct the thematic base on which the performers - two men and one woman - act out the pain and ecstasy of multi-form sexuality, and human deprivation and need.

In response to the discordant lament of the instruments, they are inarticulate, prisoners in the human body, they have 'no language but a cry'. Aboriginal folk motifs - 'masterful images' - break through half-consciously, as when one of the actors, with a contortion of head, arms and fingers, suddenly becomes the Green Man, whose grimacing satyr head, with foliage sprouting from the mouth, and with staring eyes and protruding tongue, was smuggled into the churches of mediaeval Europe as a mocking remembrance of older fertility rites. After death, there is resurrection, rebirth; the performance ends with tranquil celebration, and the performer who has shown us the Green Man 'returns to the body where he was born'.