

REVIEWS

Tinhouse Experimental Dance Theatre

2007-08-26

A Most Unusual Feast

As part of the last night of the 2007 Boulder International Fringe Festival on August 26th, Tinhouse Experimental Dance Theatre presented “Eating and Dreaming” in the Exhibitrex Gallery at 171 15th Street in Boulder. Based in part on a dream one of Tinhouse’s performers, Joanna Rotkin, the work took Rotkin, Breanna Rogers, and Jayne Lee through amazing confrontations with various foods, a table, two chairs, each other, and a seemingly endless roll of duct tape that Lee and Rotkin used to try and contain the chaos all three created. The “foods” – which included empty soda cans, a box of cereal, an almost empty bottle of ketchup, sticks of celery, etc. - were examined, moved around, placed on the table, taped to the table, eaten in mime, eaten for real, and even spit back out. Chaos mounted as Lee yelled the names of imaginary characters that were seemingly ignoring the feast. And every time that chaos became almost too much to bear, the work suddenly stopped, as the three women seemed to realize it was all getting way out of control – one time disappearing behind the tipped over table and then rising slowly to peer over it at their audience with deadpan expressions that seemed to say, “Oh my God, they are still here.” Performers moved on, around, and under the table, moved the table, and the chairs, and moved the food. In one hysterical scene Rotkin desperately tried to duct tape any number of “foods,” bowls, and eating utensils to the table top as Rogers, under the table, tried desperately to move and tip it over. Rotkin “won,” but had to climb onto the table as she exerted compelling force to stop Rogers seemingly out-of-control intentions. Near the end celery sticks are found and distributed, and the performers held them reverently in front of them like palm fronds given to churchgoers on Palm Sunday. But, unlike such palm fronds the performers periodically took huge gnoshing bites of the celery. Eventually the celery sticks went into the pocket of each performer’s simple dress, some of the parts bitten off were spit out and the performance went to new chaotic, and fun to watch places.

If this sounds like an out-of-control sophomoric and improvisational romp, it was not that at all. The work seemed pretty tightly set, and the performers knew where they and each other were at any moment. Sections varied from off-the-wall funny to loving and poignant, or even painful. Scenes were kept alive just long enough, and then moved to a new place, as they reaped laughs, gasps, and sympathetic silence from the audience. If you have ever had friends go places you never imagined they could or would go – if you have been part of a totally functional family that would go dysfunctional around food

and/or the dinner table – if you ever were, or had, a Mom desperately trying to get kids to sit down for a meal - you would find something to relate to in “Eating And Dreaming.”

The 2007 Boulder International Fringe Festival is ending. Somehow the mostly volunteer staff of the Fringe got some 200+ performances by 45+ artists and/or artist groups “teched” and up. Somehow they made a ticket sale system that by nature had to be Byzantine work. Like any Fringe you pay your money and take your chances. Performances varied from delightful to what can best be described as awful, but you know what? Even the awful can be fun to watch – or if painful please realize that painful is at least off dead center numbness.

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