

REVIEWS

Johanna Walker and Lizi Watt

2007-08-18

You just might identify ...

The Boulder International Fringe Festival is presenting Johanna Walker in a work titled “Anatomy of A Yell” as Co-created and Directed by Lizi Watt. Perhaps somewhat autobiographical (for both Walker and Watt) the work explores some hysterical and poignant aspects of professionally busy women seeking relationships with men, while a busybody mother coaches, nags, and pleads for a marriage. One supposes that said marriage is also desired to produce longed for grandkids. Walker and Watt have honed the hour long, one woman show into a tight vehicle to expose the dilemmas in all of that to audiences, one of which (Saturday August 18, 2007) was delighted. Clearly part of that delight was being able to identify with Walker’s plight, and/or with the plight of the men caught up in her search for true love in a perfect relationship. With simple changes in body posture (like opening her legs as she is seated) and minimal costume changes Walker is as capable of portraying those male personas as well as she portrays her own.

The work opened to Walker standing on a dais upstage as she stutteringly described how she meets friends in coffee shops where she knows most other customers are eavesdropping. She did that in a way that every audience member identified with her experience, and that was just the first time she drew the audience in like that. The work moved on using key props, sound scores, and places in space to define what Walker was dealing with at any moment. She used her Mac laptop to join Match.com, she tried to explain to her mother that she really was dating, and that she really was searching for a way to not be “forever alone.” A teapot - given to her by her mother as a tea pot that would guarantee finding a man - that played pertinent music every time she dared take the cover off, a computer that “dinged” whenever a new suitor appeared on line from Match.com, a chair where she visited with her mother every single Tuesday, a mother that spoke to her from out-of-the-ether in phrases from Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, and a hanging picture frame that helped Walker explore who she was and wanted to be were used repeatedly in delightful ways. Each use was at a different point in Walker’s process and told the audience how things can stay the same even as changes occur. Walker’s voice and movement abilities served well, but most apparent were her considerable acting skills, which allowed instant changes in gender, personality, emotions, and hopes. Those hopes varied from finding Mr. Nice, to finding Mr. Great-In-The-Sack, or Mr. Very-Intelligent, every one of which would understand her and give her the space she needed. All of those hopes – every single one – had a commonality in that they all ended with her as a perfect woman, driving off toward the horizon in a blue pick-

up truck, with a perfect man, on the way to a perfect life. The “yell,” which in an instant turned the work from comedy to poignancy that caused her audience to gasp (and maybe even sob), resulted from Walker’s sudden realization that none of that may ever happen. She tried to rationalize that maybe being a perfect old-maid-woman-artist would be enough, but it was clear she had trouble accepting that ending.

The technical support for this show was tight and close to perfect. Much of Walker’s and Watt’s score depended on perfectly timed sound cues, and perfect they were. Walker’s abilities, that superb tech support (even with the Dairy East minimal light plot and sound system), and Walker’s and Watt’s sense of timing and the performance life of every segment a character portrayed in this show make it a “must see” performance. “Anatomy of A Yell” will be presented again on Sunday August 18th at 8:00 PM, Wednesday the 22nd at 10:00 PM, Thursday the 23rd at 5:00 PM, Saturday August 25th at 6:30 PM, and Sunday August 25th at 5:30 PM. All performances are in the Boulder Dairy Center’s East Theatre. And I am turning red every time I think of lame lines I have used to impress women. It seems Walker and Watt have heard every one of them.

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