

REVIEWS

Odonata Dance Project

2007-08-17

An Escape From Hell

The 2007 Boulder (Colorado) International Fringe Festival has started, and will continue through August 27th. For the uninitiated, that Fringe will present in excess of 40 different music, dance, theatre, etc. artists, or art groups, in more than 200 concerts in a mind numbing number of venues. Those venues are all within Boulder's city limits, vary from a theatre with 250 seats to the artists' living rooms, may be hard to find, and just may be sold out when you do find them. Who performs at the Fringe is determined by lottery drawing of applicants. So it is not adjudicated in any way and, unless they already know the group they plan to see, audience pays its money and takes its chances. Publicity for anyone performance can be over-the-top in superlatives and actual performances can vary from wonderful to awful. So realize that part of the Fringe is in accepting what is there.

Brooklyn's Odonata Dance Project presented "Etymology of a Person" at the Boulder Contemporary Art Museum (BMOCA) on August 17, the second night of the 2007 Fringe. Odonata's program says the work is directed and choreographed by Jessica Bonenfant and performed by Bonenfant, Rachel Borgman, Sara Greenfield, Itsuko Higashi, and Kristina Walton, but in the August 17th performance only four of those ladies appeared. The work opened to three performers in dresses and in a line alternately laughing and then repeating a simple dance phrase. A fourth scantily clad woman entered and tried to "belong" as she was ignored by the other three. Eventually it was "revealed" that all these performers had been condemned to the underworld, and that the scantily clad entry had just arrived. The original three grudgingly shared their clothes with her. A black and white video of a somewhat feminine persona (with a male voice) named "Chi Chi," appeared and announced a contest of many events for which pomegranates would be given to the winner of each. At the end of that contest the one with the most pomegranates would be allowed to return to life in the surface world, said life to be determined by one pomegranate's seed.

Each contest was announced by the video persona, "Chi Chi," and the performers "competed" using roller skates (which took forever to put on), a large number of eclectic props with internal lights, their voices, movement phrases that varied from bad dance to poorly executed contact improvisation and lifts, and a broken down typewriter. They spoke and sang in English and Japanese, or pseudo typed their ideas and/or answers to questions read to them by audience members, all of which bordered on sophomoric and extended way past any reasonable performance life. They exchanged clothes, disrobed,

one contestant put on a dress hanging in the space, and finally the contests produced a winner and the audience was allowed to leave. The program indicated that all of this was supposed to relate to “the myth of Persephone” as found by Bonenfant while researching the word “etymology.” Now if you think that is a stretch try watching four women roller skate in the teeny BMOCA performance space while they look scared to death of falling down.

The text provided by Carolyn Siegel for “Chi Chi” was interesting and at times funny, and “Chi Chi’s” voice was engagingly personified by Edmund B. Ligan. None of the rest of the performers exhibited abilities that could sustain anything close to the hour the show lasted. One good thing about this show was that my ticket only cost \$8.00.

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