

REVIEWS

Staats Production Works

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Falling Awake – a Metaphor for Life

Wess Staats, of Boulder, Colorado's Staats Performance Works, is presenting a one-woman show, "Falling Awake," this weekend (August 24, 25, 26, 2007) in the Boulder Dairy Center for the Arts Performance Space as part of the 2007 Boulder International Fringe Festival. Staats is a relatively small person who can totally fill any space all by herself, with energies and kinesphere that range from hyperkinetic and huge, to minimalism, and even stillness. Largely autobiographical "Falling Awake" is Staats' attempt to take her audiences through childhood, puberty, and maturity, to having children of their own. Most of the time "Falling Away" works, and given Staats presence any audience will exit not even worried about if and when it did not "work." They will also learn just how much Staats' own children mean to her.

"Falling Apart" is constructed around a series of dance solos by Staats, dance and text solos by Staats, a series of videos that vary from drawings of kids, of Staats examining body parts she worried about in puberty, of spaces, and lots and lots of videos and pictures of Staats' kids and their friends. The work opens and closes with a dance solo by Staats in a stage right downlight. Each time her movements are often huge, then suddenly stop, or become a minimalist exploration of the edges of the light cone. The work moves through several solos, many including text spoken by Staats. Much of that text is lost in the back rows of the theatre, which is sad in that Staats clearly has much to say that is relevant to her life - and to ours. In one solo, and in videos, Staats recalls puberty and her realization that her body was changing, her breasts developing, and that she was not one of the boys. She tells how she became at ease with her breasts, and reveals how she likes the changes child bearing and child nursing has brought to them. In the videos her breasts even develop eyes with which she can look at her world from their perspective. Some of the dance is on top of a huge "box" wrapped in green paper. Some of the video is about toys, and real toys march into the space all by themselves as they chirp and whirl. One video of Staats' daughter singing "You Are My Sunshine" is especially poignant, and Staats somehow gets it out there in a context that does not make it cheesy.

Wess Staats is a marvelous dancer, and that gives any solo she does a substantial performance life. That life will lengthen when she uses a wider movement vocabulary, but in "Falling Awake" the vocabulary was enough. Yes, some of the videos of her kids and her kids' friends went on for a long time, but if you have kids and/or grandkids they were not "too" long. Yes, much of "Falling Awake" is self indulgent, but "duh," it is

about Wess Staats. Yes, Staats' moving into the audience and engaging each and every audience member could be seen as a bit over-the-top, but if you know her you know people are important to her, including her audience. Yes, some of the transitions between "pieces" were long, but it is a one-woman show and Staats is not only the performer, but also the only stagehand. I don't care how well you know Wess Staats, but I do know she will give you glimpses into who she is now that you never knew about. "Falling Apart" will be presented again on Saturday August 25th at 3:00 PM and 7:30 PM, and on Sunday August 26th at 4:30 PM.

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