

Casebolt and Smith bring their stellar 'O(h)' to Los Angeles

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LOS ANGELES – Casebolt and Smith, the two-person dance company featuring Liz Casebolt and Joel Smith, is a breath of fresh air to the modern-dance world. These two enormously talented performers are able to offer a finely-focused evening of intricate dance moves, while simultaneously excoriating the very profession they've dedicated their lives to perfecting. In their new show, *O(h)*, it's almost as if the audience is given the chance to watch a piece of art come to life with the accompanying DVD commentary track.

The dancers first take the stage at The Actors Company Theatre in West Hollywood to perform some warm-ups in front of the crowd. The show hasn't even started yet and Casebolt and Smith are already proving unconventional. The performers strive to drop any barriers between themselves and the audience: There should be no secrets, no curtains, no misdirection about the interpretation of this interpretive dance. Casebolt and Smith want to be understood.

As the formal one-hour performance begins, both dancers address the crowd almost as if we are their pupils. They talk to us in soothing, measured tones, ensuring everything is laid bare. As they begin their recitations, Casebolt and Smith also perform their dance moves, which run the gamut from skilled duo pieces to somber solos.

Smith is a tall, slender dancer with the unique ability to throw his body around the stage in graceful, yet somehow fierce, movements. He's an untethered ball of enthusiasm, and he uses his entire body to convey the various emotions that surface in *O(h)*.

Casebolt is a much smaller, quieter dancer, but no less effective. She finds her placement with a studious look, trying to simultaneously conjoin perfection and seeming improvisation. She achieves an unprecedented mastery of her body, knowing how to tell stories with a few moves of the hands or feet.

But modern-dance purists shouldn't attend *O(h)* thinking they are going to find a retreat of Alvin Ailey or Martha Graham. Instead, Casebolt and Smith use their platform to critique, demystify and comprehend what it means to put "modern" next to the word "dance."

When they raise their arms to the ceiling, they explain the reasoning behind such a move. When Casebolt starts dancing a solo number, using bastardized versions of famous dance moves from other choreographers, Smith follows with a microphone, questioning his partner as she makes her choices. This is a performance that's not only about the process of dancing, it's also about the instigation of the audience to bridge the fourth wall and understand what's on display right in front of their eyes.

Casebolt and Smith offer their thesis on a bare stage that lights up with colorful wiring (the scenic design is credited to Predock_Frane Architects). But if it were up to the performers, they would probably invite the audience onto the stage to take part in the creative process. They are dedicated to immersion and subtext; they emphasize hard-earned intimacy. By the end of the one-hour performance, after Casebolt and Smith have recapped what the audience just witnessed, you oddly (and wonderfully) feel at one with the dancers. They have allowed us to turn the tables and see what happens when an idea is taken from conception to materialization.

Best of all, the duo finishes the performance with a bit of improvisational choreography, giving audiences a chance to watch the creative process unfold. The Actors Company Theatre, where *O(h)* continues until Feb. 19, may look like a traditional black-box theater, but it feels more like a rehearsal studio, an invitation to



Casebolt and Smith -- Photo courtesy of Jeff Larson

come forward and not just appreciate, but truly understand.

By John Soltes / Publisher / John@HollywoodSoapbox.com

- **O(h)**
- **Performed by Casebolt and Smith (Liz Casebolt and Joel Smith)**
- **Scenic design by Predock_Frane Architects**
- **Playing at The Actors Company Theatre at 916a Formosa in West Hollywood. Tickets range from \$22 to \$30.**
- **Running time: 60 minutes**
- **Click [here](#) for more information.**
- **Rating:** 