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"Casebolt and smith: Speaking Out" at the Southern—A view

by [John Munger](#) | 8/5/09 • This is a very engaging show. If you've not seen much dance, and feel like a newbie, you'll get a kick out of this one. If you're a full scale professional dancer or choreographer you'll enjoy the too-true satirical take on rehearsal processes and related matters. The next word that comes to my mind after "engaging" is "clever."

Basically there are four pieces. The first and last are pure movement and the middle two involve text delivered live by the dancers. The dancing is fairly conventional contemporary post-modern. It is relaxed and impulse-driven, walking a line between technical prowess (pointed feet, the ability to turn, etc) and today's trendy preference for natural authenticity. Arm, head and torso gestures tend to be inventive rather than "classical," evocative rather than abstract, and human in preference over virtuosic.

The very brief opening piece, set to the Courante movement from the D-minor suite for unaccompanied cello by J.S. Bach, is charming, succinct and physical. I love that they describe this curtain-raiser on their Fringe webpage as "a meaningless virtuosic display of dancing, meant to wow and please more conservative dance goers with pointed feet and long lines." There is a delightful level of irony and of not taking themselves nor anybody else too damn seriously throughout this show.

The extended ending piece, again to Bach cello suite music, begins as a series of hand gestures on a table. These gestures extend to heads, full upper bodies and ultimately a kind of relationship between the two figures seated behind this table. It is abstract but strangely personal, engrossing, and rhythmically inventive in subtle ways.

GOING THROUGH THE MOVEMENTS IS THE BLOG OF JOHN MUNGER, ONE OF SEVEN BLOGGERS COVERING THE MINNESOTA FRINGE FESTIVAL FOR THE DAILY PLANET.

But the real flavor and identity of the show is in the middle two pieces which involve dialogue delivered live by the performers themselves. These are the pieces that will neither bewilder nor blow past widely diverse audiences. These are the pieces that are unique on this Fringe to this dance producer. Love it or question it, these are the pieces that define this show.

The premise in each case is that two dancers do what they do while conducting a conversation. For starters, the conversation is neither crafted nor scripty. It has the (carefully rehearsed, I'm sure) off hand quality of two people exchanging really ordinary conversation, not very poetically, about really unremarkable stuff. This verbal content does a lot to put an audience at ease, especially an audience of non-dancers. It doesn't sound like crafted script on a presentational stage. It sounds like what you overheard last Thursday at some everyday location. It's "normal." So everyone relaxes. No hoity-toity modruhn dance pretensions here!!

One piece involves a couple meeting each other at what I took to be an audition. They're both learning the dance phrase that has been offered and they talk their way through learning the phrase and getting acquainted, or more than acquainted. The other piece involves a dance couple rehearsing a duet they are creating. Though the two pieces differ in situation and content they are similar in tone, method and effect. I'll focus on just the second, by way of example.

They begin by doing very little, and it's intentionally cheesy. Then they compliment each other lavishly on how fabulous that was. That's the first of about fourteen layers of irony.

Next, they enter discussion and rehearsal of how she will tilt forward, falling like an ironing board, and he will stop her with his hands. On her boobs. No, the hands can't be sort of to the side under the pits because there isn't enough support. Yep. Right on 'em. They try this. The first try isn't quite right and there is technical discussion of whether the catch point should be higher or lower, coming from beneath, directly forward, or otherwise. They rehearse quite earnestly and with several repetitions. From time to time they congratulate each other on how really fabulous the choreographic solutions and each others' work are. All totally deadpan.

Hopefully that example has just demonstrated what I mean about this being a good chuckle for dancers and non-dancers alike. Having been there and done that (sort of), I slapped my knee and howled. Along with a lot of the other 90 or so people present.

But that's only the start of the shenanigans. They aren't all sexually charged but so many are really very funny. If you are a dancer you will relate to rehearsals you've had, with a wry cackle. If you're a fan but not a dancer you'll appreciate an inside look at what rehearsals really go like (sort of). And if you're a complete newbie to dance you'll laugh your butt off just because it's genuinely funny.

I think it's fair to say that the sum of the parts is what makes the show, not the individual elements. The dancing is skillful and attractive, but nothing special. Indeed, during the two middle pieces, it takes a back seat to the dialogue. The dialogue itself is hysterical, but Casebolt and Smith are not masterful of how to project without yelling, how to deliver with nuance without sounding phony and how to articulate without sounding like Dame Edna. They dance very very well, they have wonderful concepts, they have a dry wit that is delicious, but you can't always hear nor understand them.

They have two more performances at the Southern Theater: Thu at 7:00pm and Fri at 8:30pm.

NOTE: This blog does not reflect the opinions or policies of the Minnesota Fringe Festival, Dance/USA, nor anyone other than the author. These are purely and utterly my own observations and views.

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