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O(h) at The Actors Company Theatre

by Bree Long



Dance duo Liz Casebolt and Joel Smith meld deconstructed modern dance and narrative storytelling in the premier of *O(h)*, a provocative and witty commentary that confronts gender and sexuality politics while poking fun at the overly self-important world of modern dance.

Founded in 2006, the dance company duo of Casebolt & Smith recently wrapped up a buzz-worthy inaugural tour of *O(h)* in 2011, returning to Los Angeles with new vigor and hell bent on bringing their amalgamated version of expressive movement to the world of theater in Los Angeles.

The duo has taken a risk in self-producing a six-week run of *O(h)*. Aiming to woo the interest of traditional theater junkies and soften the jagged edges of the so oft impervious world of dance, Casebolt & Smith soak the stage with easy humor, self-mockery, and humility. All their cheeky commentary and cavorting about has just the intended effect; putting their audience at ease, assuaging their insecurities about what dance should mean, and creating connection that allows the audience to now understand what was once out of reach.

The show gets off to a matter-of-fact start while Casebolt & Smith introduce themselves to the audience, launching in to a narrated, choreographed rant about cliché and just how low they're willing to go (or not) in pursuit of their craft. An impressive display of story through gesture rolls in to a '70's flashback wherein the duo spoofs choreography with listless aplomb, mapping out the apparently universal back-up singer moves to *Proud Mary*.

Now, we see Casebolt & Smith, each on their own, offering the audience a glimpse of their individual viewpoints on the world they imbue. Casebolt, with her *Maria* from *West Side Story*, teases with her nimble-mindedness and penchant for interrupting her own thoughts with random repartee. Smith showcases the fluidity of his form and reminds us that 'what is *now*, is *back then*, and what was *back then* is now, *now*.'

Each solidly charming as solo artists, the two together are greater than the sum of their parts. If you wonder how they do it, their closing display of improvisational choreography provides a glimpse of a rare kind of artistic kismet that must align complementary elements, for these two were meant for each other.

Hadrian Predock & John Frane (Predock Frane Architects) are credited with conceptualizing the working backdrop for *O(h)*, a precisionist mapping of colored and glowing EL wires that visually anchor the performers to the otherwise empty space. The set is smart, mainly in its ability not to detract from the performers.

If there is one criticism of this production, it's that the thirty dollar price tag for tickets to a one hour show may very well reinforce the wall that its provocateurs have set out to dismantle. If accessibility is truly the aim of the work, then so too should it be the aim of the producing body that determines who is worthy of exposure to the show's counterproposal that challenges the notion of the impenetrability of dance. Still, *O(h)* nails the irony between impertinent confrontation and deep veneration for an art form and the undeniable chemistry between Casebolt and Smith make this a show worth taking in.

O(h) is performed Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m. and Sundays at 5 p.m. through February 19th, 2012.

The Actors Company Theatre is located at 916a N Formosa Ave. in West Hollywood, just west of LA Brea Ave. and south of Santa Monica Blvd.

Ticket prices: \$30 general admission, \$22 students and seniors.