

Arts Arena Blog

Casebolt and Smith: 'O(h)' is a not-to-miss Fringe show

By **Camille LeFevre** | Published Mon, Aug 9 2010 8:58 am

Try, just try to nab a ticket to [Casebolt and Smith's](#) new show, "O(h)," playing during the [Fringe Festival](#). The Los Angeles-based duo sold out their Fringe performances last year, and the opening-night premiere of "O(h)" was packed with enthusiastic fans eager to see what the witty dance duo is up to now.

Plenty! Liz Casebolt (straight) and Joel Smith (gay), who initiated their collaboration in 2006 to explore and implode conventional ideas about gender, relationships and dance making, create perhaps the most entertaining, engaging and explicative dance theater on the planet. With disarming ingenuity and whip-smart intelligence, they gently serve up — via song, dance and by simply talking to us — our most-cherished and problematic ideas about contemporary performance, male-female relationships and creative collaboration, then graciously and hilariously debunk them.

For example, "O(h)" begins and ends with an intricately performed gestural phrase for which they provide myriad meanings (a Casebolt and Smith signature) — e.g., you can read into dance whatever you like, which they also mention is something dance goes frequently worry about. They also build, using the basic step-touch move, a wildly complicated phrase that demonstrates just how dance gets made.

Casebolt sings (beautifully) the "I Feel Pretty" solo from "West Side Story" — while dressed in glittery gown and jacket — with plentiful asides questioning the premise of the song's lyrics. Smith, while moving with leonine physicality and grace (sometimes in Superman underwear), wonders what, exactly, is contemporary dance.

Together they run through a litany of the most tired and silly characteristics marking today's dance — from running in a circle to mark a transition (modern), to spitting up on the floor (post-modern). They question the propriety of copying and using dance moves, whether from ballet or Martha Graham. And they collaborate on a dance phrase — she sings and choreographs, he gives her the lyrics and performs the moves — that neatly sums up their remarkable partnership.

A wholly original performance that's both thought-provoking and fun, "O(h)" seems tailor-made for jaded dance goers. You can almost see and hear the proverbial balloons — bursting with the hot air of artistic self-importance — quietly popping. Let's just say: If you don't laugh during this show, you're taking yourself, and/or your art, way too seriously. Because within the finely crafted irreverence of Casebolt and Smith's perspectives lie a deep love and sophisticated commitment to art, creativity and collaboration.

Curiously, during Saturday night's performance, I counted no more than two people from the Twin Cities dance community in the audience. In other words, the general Fringe-going public is mad for Casebolt and Smith — people who ordinarily might not attend a dance performance. Which says a lot about how dance today can and needs to reach new audiences.

So kudos to Fringers for loving this daring duo; and five kitties to Casebolt and Smith for teasing apart, with such honesty and grace, the webs of assumptions in which we often find ourselves tangled. I can't wait to see what they'll do next.

Performance at the Southern Theater, Minneapolis, Thursday, Aug.12, 10 p.m.; Friday, Aug. 13, 7 p.m.; Sunday, Aug. 15, 1:00 p.m.

Dance | [Mon, Aug 9 2010 8:58 am](#)