

## **CASEBOLT AND SMITH'S *O(h)***

Theater Review by Samuel Bernstein

A friend of mine has a pet peeve about actors going onstage barefooted.

Especially in smaller theaters, where you're up close, and have to sit through the whole show watching their dirty feet.

Which reminds him of porn.

Personally, I don't remember ever seeing dirty feet in porn, but I share his distaste for dirty feet in the theater. Not out of some aversion to the messiness of life—my own feet are, at this very moment, rather sooty from lack of footwear—rather, because it's so distracting, and takes away from the beauty of movement and purpose.

So the first thing that delights me about *O(h)* is that by using their own portable stage floor, and admirable diligence, Liz Casebolt and Joel Smith spend the entire evening barefooted, yet their feet are shiny and clean.

Which matters.

And it matters because it's the sort of care and attention to detail that is evident throughout this brilliant production, which deconstructs dance and theater, only to put them back together with thrilling alacrity and charm.

It's funny, sly, wonderfully staged, imaginative, and quite perfect—even when it isn't perfect at all.

It's a hard show to describe in a way that makes you want to see it.

Saying it is a collection of pieces that deconstruct dance and theater doesn't make it sound particularly appetizing. Even the word 'deconstruct' makes most people run the other way, imagining a precious, tedious tone will rule the night.

But when Casebolt and Smith do just that, when they deconstruct, it's not just about how a dance is created, or what a dramatic or comedic scene means.

Their reach is so much wider.

They talk about what they are thinking, what they think *we* are thinking, show business, body image, music, politics—even a little physics gets thrown in, as well as the sort of geometry lessons that might have gotten me better grades in high school if my teacher had been even half as entertaining as these duet dance theater partners.

And the numbers where they dance to dialogue rather than music are stunning in their wit, ingenuity, and humor. They often give different meanings to the same series of movements, twisting that meaning to suit their fancies.

Smith moves a mile a minute, his thoughts fleeting. *Catch me if you can!* He is propelled by pure pleasure in himself, winking a lot, literally and figuratively, and it works.

Casebolt is slower. She starts out scrunched up and worried, and builds her patterns and emotional through-lines thoughtfully, sometimes painstakingly, and it works just as well, providing the counterpoint one would hope for in a duet dance theater performance, if, before this show, one could have conceived of the existence of such a thing.

The showiest piece is a total deconstruction on the Amen Break—a drum riff that is the backbone of just about every popular song of the last few decades. It begins as a dry affair. Smith describes it, tells us its importance, his affection for it—all in a very informational, almost professorial way.

Then the whole thing builds and builds until it happily explodes. I still grin when I think about it.

What is planned and what is improvised remains something of a mystery, even as they tell you up front what has been planned and what has been improvised.

The set is designed and created by Hadrian Predock and John Frane. It might appear to be little more than a collection of colored tubes against white space, but their work is deceptively simple. And it *moves*. Somehow it seems to turn and weave itself into Casebolt and Smith's bodies.

I'm completely aware that what I have just written makes almost no literal sense.

But it's exactly the way it is.

Which is exactly what the show is.

Even when it isn't.

Layer upon layer, Casebolt and Smith out-meta meta, expanding yet crushing the entire concept until you forget how tired you are of the word 'meta' and how it makes you feel old and exhausted.

Or is it just me?

*O(h)* runs Fridays @ 8 pm, Saturdays @ 8 pm, and Sundays @ 5 pm, through February 19. Tickets are \$30; students and seniors are \$22. The Actors Company Theatre is located at 916a N. Formosa Ave, West Hollywood, CA 90046. To purchase tickets, call 800-838-3006 or go to [www.caseboltandsmith.com](http://www.caseboltandsmith.com). Find them on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/caseboltandsmith](http://www.facebook.com/caseboltandsmith).

*Samuel Bernstein* is an award-winning author and screenwriter living in West Hollywood with husband Ronald Shore and their two pill-popping dachshunds.

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