



Los Angeles Theater Review: O(H) (casebolt and smith)

by Sarah Taylor Ellis on January 19, 2012

NOT YOUR ORDINARY EVENING OF DANCE



Liz Casebolt and Joel Smith's long-term friendship shapes their every move as a duo dance company. Such a partnership between a straight woman and gay man is not unusual in the dance world. Self-conscious acknowledgement of it in a performance is. Yet fessing up to the friendship that sustains this dance company is liberating for performers and audience alike. *O(h)* feels like an open rehearsal, welcoming the audience into this couple's collaborative choreographic world with a knowing wink.

A pleasure for contemporary dance fans – as well as detractors – *O(h)* creatively deconstructs choreographic codes and conventions by incorporating as much dialogue as movement. This hybrid theater piece samples from ballet to contact improvisation, from "Flight of the Bumblebee" to "Proud Mary" – which becomes a song and dance homage to the ubiquitous step-touch. casebolt and smith's solo sections sometimes drag, but the lithe and lively banter between

these dancers and with their audience makes *O(h)* a unique theatrical invitation worth accepting.

As this duo tells the audience themselves, they have a particular knack for gestural work. casebolt and smith are a postmodern Agnes de Milles, superimposing their gestural vocabulary with possible interpretations – and the witty range of possibilities may surprise you. At the same time as casebolt and smith lampoon theatrical conceits of contemporary dance, their self-reflexive work finds clever new possibilities in each choreographic building block.

casebolt and smith find similar unexpected potential in their compact company size of only two dancers. One of their greatest limitations is their own architecture of bodies in space; they can only ever form a line in relation to one

another. The architecture of the theater – colorful illuminated lines at right angles across

the black box, designed by Predock_Frane Architects – echoes the potential architecture of the duo. Yet in course of the show, *O(h)*'s hybrid structure and rhapsodic multiplicity of styles sweeps the theater. By



no means are casebolt and smith boxed in. Rather, they acknowledge the box, then transform it from within.

The most delightful episode of the evening is undoubtedly the final several minutes, when casebolt and smith improvise a contemporary song and dance together: Joel Smith provides the trite lyrics for his mellifluous partner to sing, while Liz Casebolt demonstrates the conventional gestures that Smith will perform. On opening night, the evening ended with what should have been a cringe-worthy cliché:

*Fanning the embers of my broken heart
I saw you, through and through
We were in love
But only friends
And so the story ends happy.*



Yet somewhere in the subtle twists and turns of casebolt and smith's collaborative process, as melodies were extended and gestures elaborated, this cliché sentiment resounded as self-consciously heartfelt and true. And so the audience left happy.

O(h) – casebolt and smith
The Actors Company Theater
scheduled to end on February 19
for tickets, visit <http://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/215278>
for more info, visit <http://www.caseboltandsmith.com/>