

The Elephant in the Room (review)  
July 15, 2016 by Marshall Bradshaw  
<http://dctheatrescene.com/2016/07/15/elephant-room-review/>

Right Brain Performancelab's *The Elephant in the Room* has an ambitious goal: To engage the audience with theatrical epistemology by way of vaudeville, musical theater, ballet, Butoh, clowning... And, when it doesn't quite work, it's still making its own point. If that sounds a bit out there, it's Fringe, through and through.

Jennifer Gwartz and John Baumann founded Right Brain Performancelab in 1998, and the audience can see their years of experience. Gwartz's dance and clowning background give the show some of its most successful scenes, including a haunting and elegant shadow play that opens the show. As *The Elephant in the Room* continues and doubts about the invisible elephant's existence are repeated, the allusion to Plato's allegory of the Cave becomes clear.



Baumann has certainly learned from Gwartz's background over the past 18 years, but he is also a talented showman on his own. His cease-and-desist letter from the Seuss estate is the most delightful legalese I hope you ever face. In it, Baumann demonstrates a skill that serves the show well from beginning to end: Effortlessly ranging from silly to menacing in a word's length, and with the whole audience following closely along. Audience members with a strong fear of clowns may want to bring a friend, but Baumann doesn't linger long and keeps any menace playful.

Some parts of the show stride clear over audience members' heads. Musical numbers composed by Dave Rodgers sound good, but go on too long with too little physical accompaniment to keep them interesting for those who are not musically-inclined. And yet, those few flops are as important as the scenes that do land in illustrating the show's point: Audiences create the elephant, or whatever performers are trying to conjure in any show. If your mind wanders to what you'll make for dinner tomorrow or that attractive person you met at the Fringe bar (But, oh, they were probably just trying to sell more tickets to their show... (But they were really friendly and touched my arm- (Okay, if I see them again, I'll...))) The magic breaks down. The elephant disappears.

Okay, so, if I can do it, it's not the hardest trick to pull off.

But Gwartz and Baumann make it look much cooler.

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The Elephant in the Room. Directed by Jennifer Gwartz. Featuring John Baumann and Jennifer Gwartz. Composed by Dave Rodgers. Created and produced by the Right Brain Performancelab. Reviewed by Marshall Bradshaw.

#### About Marshall Bradshaw

Marshall Bradshaw is a DC-based actor, game designer, and marketing specialist. He's been living in DC since going to American University, where he worked with the AU Rude Mechanicals and their improv sub-troupe, the Elite Ballerina Corps, on 10 shows. Since graduating, Capital Fringe has been a wonderful, nearly-as-crazy substitute. His reviews from previous years can be found on the Washington City Paper, and he is very pleased to be writing for DC Theatre Scene this year! You can find more of him on Twitter @dMarshallb.