Peak Performances’ ‘Leonora and Alejandro’ is full of striking images

By: JAY LUSTIG | March 22, 2018

“Grand Parade (of the 20th Century),” which Massachusetts-based Double Edge Theatre presented at the Peak Performances series at Montclair State University in 2016, couldn’t have been much broader in scope—a wild jumble of music, dance, acrobatics and more, evoking various aspects of life, all around the globe, in the 20th century.

“Leonora and Alejandro: La Maga y El Maestro,” which Double Edge Theatre is currently presenting at Peak Performances, has some of the same flavor, though its subject matter is much narrower: the mentoring of Chilean filmmaker Alejandro Jodorowsky by the Mexican painter and writer Leonora Carrington.

“My guru sent me to see Leonora due to my obsession with the intellect and the Zen riddles,” says Carlos Uriona, as Jodorowsky, in the work. “He said, ‘Alejandro, art is your path. You should accept Leonora as your teacher. She doesn’t know any ancient Zen riddles but she has resolved them all.’ ”

“I am as mysterious to myself as I am to everyone else,” Carrington, played by Jennifer Johnson, replies.

It doesn’t get any less cryptic from there. Jodorowsky and Carrington — portrayed, respectively, as somewhat flippant, and utterly serious — continue communicating in philosophical parables whose meanings are elusive. Maybe it all makes sense for those who are immersed in these artists’ works. But I confess that I am not, and that “Leonora and Alejandro” didn’t do much for me, as a piece of theater.

On a visual level, though, it was pretty spectacular, as you can see for yourself from the photo, above, of Hannah Jarrell as The Giantess, and, to the right, of Amanda Miller as The Pajaro (The Bird), with Johnson as Carrington.
Double Edge Theatre founder Stacy Klein—who is credited with “direction, overall design, and creation” of the piece—packs it with striking images, from beginning to end, and they all flow together, as in a dream.

That’s similar to what Klein did in “Grand Parade (of the 20th Century),” of course, which leads to an interesting parallel. That work had a nearly infinite number of concrete things to evoke—historical characters, and places, and things, that we could all recognize. “Leonora and Alejandro” ventures inward, delving into the world of surreal imagination. And with both approaches, Klein arrives in a very similar place.

Or, as the Carrington character responds, after the Jodorowsky character asks her, “Why am I dreaming you?”: “How do you know that it is not I who am dreaming you?”