



Lucky Plush Review - A happy hour delight

By Katrina Engel

Nov. 24, 2015

I jumped at the chance to see Lucky Plush Productions in their Harris Theater debut for a couple of reasons. First and foremost, I had attended college with the founding Artistic Director, **Julia Rhoads**. I remembered immediately what a gorgeous dancer she was (those feet!) back in college. I also recalled that she started her dance career as a ballet dancer, so I was quite intrigued to see her work as a contemporary choreographer.



Trip the Light Fantastic: The Making of SuperStrip

The program was an offering of the theater's first ever "Mix at Six" series of "happy hour performances" in which the company gives its audience a shortened sampling of their work in advance of a full evening performance later in the season. For **Lucky Plush** it will be March 3, 2016, and will feature the world premiere of **Trip the Light Fantastic: The Making of SuperStrip**. The piece is a collaboration between **Ms. Rhoads**, composer **Michael Caskey**, and visual designer **John Boesche**. **SuperStrip** balances dance, music, video, and visual design in a graphic novel-inspired style. Loosely inspired by the sensational stories and larger-than-life characters in classic pulp magazines, **SuperStrip** follows a group of washed up superheroes attempting to reinvent themselves by starting a non-profit think tank for do-gooders. Unable to agree on their mission, the unlikely league of supers begins a strategic planning process to determine their brand, create a manifesto, and codify their powers into specialized movement techniques. Contemporary dance meets an animated graphic novel, part comic-strip, part silent film.

As explained by **Ms. Rhoads** in the break between pieces, **Lucky Plush** typically performs evening length works that aim at "...shedding the presentational aspects of dance and theatre..." Thus, we were treated to excerpts from two pieces, **The Queue** and **Cinderbox 2.0**.

The Queue unfolds in a fictional airport, where travelers stumble humorously, tragically, and awkwardly into each other's private lives. **The Queue** draws upon 20th century forms of slapstick, Vaudeville, and Busby Berkeley-style choreography to playfully stage private dramas slipping into public spectacle, and the work features original music by neo-vaudevillian drum and piano duo **The Claudettes**.



The Queue

The combination of theater and dance in **The Queue** was delightful from the very beginning. I was pleasantly surprised by the dancers' comedic timing and the seamless way in which they navigated the choreography, dialogue, and props. I was waiting to see nods to the aggravation that so many people feel when at the airport, but that did not come to fruition, at least not in the section I saw. The use of props was quite wonderful, especially the long strip of cloth as the conveyor belt for suitcases. I also really enjoyed how each dancer's character was revealed through their interactions with the other performers. I was quite intrigued by the thickening plot being developed when the excerpt ended, and I hope to see the entire piece in the future.



The Queue

The next excerpt, from **Cinderbox 2.0**, explores the comedy and anxiety in our media's voyeuristic approach to "reality" through a performance that blurs the distractions between observer and observed, personal and presentational, and scripted and off-the-cuff. The choreography is built upon incremental gestures that accumulate and dissolve in unexpected ways for a performance that is oddly familiar and wonderfully surprising.



Cinderbox 2.0

This description of **Cinderbox 2.0** is quite apt. The contrast between what looked like improvisation and perfectly synchronized group dance phrases was awesome, as were the moments of technically stunning dance in stark contrast to absurd and humorous movement. The lines between fiction and reality were brilliantly intertwined, and I'm sure change somewhat from performance to performance, i.e. one of the dancers calling Ms. Rhodes in the middle of performance.

The company of dancers is remarkably organic in their movement and acting, and I was especially impressed by the excellence and diversity of the male dancers: **Michel Rodrigues Cintra**, **Marc Macaranas**, and especially **Benjamin Wardell**. **Mr. Wardell**, a solidly built man, can seemingly do any style of dance, from classical ballet to William Forsythe-like contemporary, and everything in between. His talents were used brilliantly in this piece.



Cinderbox 2.0

All in all, it was a wonderful glimpse into the world of **Julia Rhoads** and **Lucky Plush Productions**. I was so happy to see a college classmate of mine as a creative and curious artist, finding success with her passion in exploring the human condition through the mediums of dance, theater, and music. I look forward to seeing Lucky Plush's new work, **Trip the Light Fantastic: The Makin of SuperStrip**, in March of 2016 at the **Harris Theater**. Based on this performance, my expectations are high for an evening of thought provoking artistry.

More information from the [LuckyPlushwebsite](#)

All photo credits: Cheryl Mann