



"What Happened in Boston, Willie"

Reviews of Current Productions

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"Acts of Futility"

An Evening of one-act plays by Samuel Beckett

Production Design by Pat Keck
Directed by Steve Rotolo

Set & Costume Design by Loann West
Lighting Design by John Peitso
Makeup Design by Richard Sullivan
Costume Design by Andrea Goodman
Sound Design by Duncan McCulloch
Produced by Steve Rotolo, John Peitso, Jennifer Johnson
Stage Manager Dirk de Pagter

THE PLAYS

Catastrophe
Act Without Words
Come And Go
Act Without Words 2
Ohio Impromptu
Breath

THE CAST

Jason Beals
Susan Gross
Wendy Nystrom
Robin Rapaport
Sean Stanco

Whenever I see theatrical works by Samuel Beckett done as lovingly as Molasses Tank Productions does, they remind me of the 12-tone minimalist music of Anton Webern. Beckett took pride in eliminating the un-

necessary until only powerful, enigmatic, expressive fragments were left. There is a hint of ritual in their repetitions, and their silences seem to shout as loudly as their sentences, or phrases, or mime. There are five people in not-quite-mime white-face here, doing six pieces for theater that, total, take about an hour --- every second of which is rich with intense, understated emotion.

At the newly renovated Charlestown Working Theatre the play-space features a black-and-white checkerboard floor, emphasizing the white faces and often black costuming. Nothing is ever hurried. Set-pieces like a bench or a chair or a box are carried on then off by the actors, with bits of music marking separations from one play to the next.

What happens?

Well, for "Act Without Words" an apparent prisoner is shoved roughly onstage, then commanded by sharp whistles to notice or to try things ... to sit in the shade of a tree dangled into his space --- until it shuts like an umbrella ... to reach for or try to climb to a flask of water dangled just out of reach ... to try to cut his own throat. Though there are no walls, the edges of the checkerboard only get him shoved roughly back when he approaches them ... and eventually, though the flask descends and even caresses his chin, he lies, inert, beaten, motionless.

Abou Ghraib has made this play, forged out of experience after World War II, achingly pertinent again.

For "Catastrophe" a seated critic --- or director, or sculptor --- dictates changes in the figure of a man frozen on a plinth, his body slightly bent, his hands thrust, perhaps pleadingly, before him. The cool, imperious critic calls for him to be made-up "more ashen", for the hands to be not fists, but open talons, the head more lowered. The secretary --- or stage-manager, or sculptor --- writes notes of or makes the changes, walking the distance to and back from the figure unhurriedly each time.

At the end of this first piece, the figure --- or actor, or statue --- stands in silent, motionless reaction to a catastrophe --- a flood, an earthquake, a war --- a catastrophe nonetheless.

Yet not all here is pain. "Act Without Words 2" begins with two muffled sleeping-bags, one of which is poked by a long pole out of the ceiling and a tired, depressed, sighing man emerges, puts on a pile of clothing, spits out a bite of the carrot in a pocket, then takes them off again and, sighing, disappears into the bag. The goad punches the next and another, energetic man pops forth, does exercizes, brushes teeth and hair, puts on the same clothes, energetically chews a mouthful of carrot, then disrobes, exercizes, and disappears into his bag. When the goad wakes the sighing man again, the lights dim.

As a connoisseur of the absurdities of life I could not help but laugh.

The night I was there, though, the audience rarely did, and refrained even from applauding any of the pieces until the quintet of performers assembled for final bows. I have no idea whether their Director, Steve Rotolo, was pleased or outraged at their silence.

But if I were to ask him which, I'll bet he'd only answer
"Yes!"

And he'd be right.

Love,
===Anon.

"Acts of Futility" (6 - 22 October)

[MOLASSES TANK PRODUCTIONS](#)

Charlestown Working Theater, 442 Bunker Hill Street, CHARLESTOWN MA

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