

Week 3 - Reviewed by Reagan Wilson

October 4, 2007

The Estrogenius Festival, back for its eighth season at Manhattan Theatre Source, offers a month of theatre, dance, music, and visual art either created by women or created by men who "give voice to strong, complex, female characters." The festival in its third week offered a series of five short plays, all of which, as luck would have it, were written and directed by women.

The evening begins with *The Body Washer* by Rosemary Frisino Toohey. The war in Iraq is explored, from the perspectives of three women: a soldier, a reporter, and an Iraqi body washer. The soldier is sadly stiff and emotionless. The reporter mainly rattles off statistics. These characters almost seem like an after thought in Toohey's writing, added to frame the story of the body washer. The body washer is responsible for cleaning and preparing the dead for burial. For this play, Rasha Zamamiri embodies this role heart and soul. We see a young woman who understands her job and considers it a privilege. We see the emotional struggle this young woman endures from being given a job knowing the suffering that the victims and the families of the victims have experienced.

Please Remove This Stuffed Animal from My Head by Crystal Jackson, explores the process of obtaining an abortion. A man has a small cuddly lion attached to his head and very much wants it removed. The men running the clinic try to deter him. The actors give it their all, but the play is very reliant on the site gag of watching men walk around with stuffed animals on their heads. The actors are forced to engage in a round robin of questions, and one really just wants them to get to the end. Yes, the end has a twist. Yes, we saw it coming a mile away. Yes, it's still fun to watch the actors deliver the end.

Crossing Over by Natalia Naman is well written, well directed, and deliciously performed. The biggest surprise of the evening, thanks to the direction of Mary E. Hodges, the play opens with what appears to be a dance between actors Amy Lee Pearsall, Tarantino Smith, and Chandra Thomas. We are then transported to the South, where what unfolds is a tale of lies, rape, and murder giving new meaning to the phrase "blood is thicker than water."

In Dog Years by T.D. Mitchell, is about the relationship between two women and what happens to their love once they adopt a puppy. Wonderfully directed by Rosalie Purvis, the characters provide narration while wearing oversized dog collars and giving various commands to one another. The lovers, played by Ivory Aquino and Marinda Anderson, are delightfully comical and down-to-earth. One can sympathize with Anderson's character as she struggles with acceptance from her lover and with loving a new pet.

Rumple Schumumple, written by Megan Gogerty, uses the fairy tale "Rumplestiltskin" to explore motherhood. The queen who is also a new mom, is unable to guess Rumplestiltskin's name and, to the surprise of the dark elf, agrees to give up her child without regret. Though it's fun to watch these committed actors work through this fairy tale, Gogerty's play goes nowhere fast.

Week 3 of the Source's festival proved to be an overall enjoyable evening of theatre with each play offering a unique view on the plight of women. If Week 4 is anything like it, then one is bound to enjoy the well-oiled machine that is the Estrogenius Festival.