

The Madness of Small Worlds

by Killian Melloy
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Erin Mallon as "A very tall young girl..." and possible denizen of "Horrocks (and Toutatis Too)" (Source: David Marshall)

What a strange, mesmerizing production Sleeping Weazel had on their hands with **"The Madness of Small Worlds,"** a trio of thematically-linked one-act plays that enjoyed a too-brief, two-night run at the Paramount Center.

Sleeping Weazel's slogan is "Making Different Possible." The troupe not only gave its audiences something different; it gave them three juicy morsels to chew on, each very different from the others and pretty novel in and of themselves.

These stories seem to be set on alien planets called Horrocks, Toutatis, and Woo World. Or maybe they are taking place in a dystopian future, and the "worlds" represent social strata. Or maybe we've rocketed right out of space-time and into a realm of forms and ideas -- the dwelling place of what the ancient Greeks called the "eidos" of things. At any rate, there's a definite sense of elevation, and ratification, as the plays unfold.

First up is the brief two-woman installment "Wrench," by Elana Greenfield (and directed by Kenneth Prestininzi), in which "Woman 1" (Kate Snodgrass) and "Woman 2" (Katie Pearl) cling to a pair of ladders that serve as their homes. Dressed as futuristic scavengers, they look rather

like *"Star Trek"'s* Borg -- and their ladders almost resemble the alcoves that those cybernetic baddies would tuck into between forays of assimilating everything in the galaxy. But these two have no plans for cosmic domination: They'll be happy if they get a good meal and can manage to keep their feet dry. They might be a vision of tomorrow's wage slaves or day laborers -- if not what it's going to mean to be a small business proprietor before too many more election cycles have passed.

The second play, title "Horrocks (and Toutatis Too)," written by Mac Wellman and directed by Elena Araoz, is a solo piece featuring a character know as "A very tall young girl..." (The ellipsis is, evidently, part of her name.) Erin Mallon plays "A very tall young girl..." and does delicious, delicate justice to Wellman's purling riot of wordplay. This is a piece that is, or might as well be, written in what literary scholars call "schizophrenese," a style of language that has an immediate clarity, but that seems to defy focused scrutiny. It seems, at times, like a metaphor for sexual politics, but its specific imagery -- detailing, as it does, deliberately vague notions -- doesn't stand still long enough to take on any definite labels. This is a composition... and yes, it does have a lyrical and compositional music about it... that forces you to lie back and surrender to it.

Act Two is a single presentation, also written by Wellman and directed by Araoz, a musical tour de force in which the four-piece band Electric Chamber Music takes the lyricism of the second play and brings it to literal, musical life, as a futuristic (or fantastical? Or psychotronic?) emcee -- or rather, M.C.R. (Timothy Siragusa), as he's called in the credits -- narrates and sings in a long howl of articulate frenzy, tinged not only with madness but also with bluegrass, classical, and neoclassical. It's a tale about the "erasure of identity," complete with "telepathic transparencies," a "hay ride" into either solipsism or Nirvana... and maybe both at once.

This wasn't going to be everyone's cup of tea, but for aficionados of the slanted, the atonal, the minimalist, and the hyper-shapely, super-smart edge of the arts, this "The Madness of Small Worlds" was better than your standard dose of Darjeeling. It was even better than a double shot of rye.

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