

The surreal fantasies of Robert Desrosier

When does dance become mime become reality?

PAULETTE PEIROL

The *Desrosiers Dance Theatre* leads the audience through a time-machine where shamans, court jesters and Tarot cards hold the key to mystical awakening. When does dance become mime? When does mime become reality? Desrosiers creates surreal fantasies on the themes of love, death, madness and ritual. Masks, makeup and costumes contribute to the various personae of the performers, who add mime, dance and acrobatics to make the form come to life.

Bad Weather is the audience's initiation into Desrosiers' realm; a collage of an accordion-playing minstrel swinging a life-size papier-mache cow, a woman entangled in six hoops and two men covered only in red and black body paint-bewildering to say the least. Even stranger are the actions of these characters: the accordion player (Desrosiers) milks the cow, as Claudia Moore sheds in her hoops in a doll-like trance. Suddenly, it begins to rain. Bongo drums invoke a jungle scene where two men mime ape-like movements. Desrosiers re-enters at the clap of thunder, frittering around with an outlandish umbrella. Thunderbolts and clouds are attached to it. More bizarre sequences follow. Men are covered in cow's milk. A slithering alligator chases Desrosiers. Is there a thread to tie these images together?

Desrosiers then serves up a delectable mime solo, in the Pierrot tradition. The audience savours the piece and, by this time, no longer cares to intellectualize the performance. Desrosiers' Pierrot

draws the audience into his world of intrinsic experience. Claudia Moore leads us further along the mysterious journey with her lyrical dance to a harp solo by Sarah Dalton-Phillips. Again, Moore's presence invokes rain. With crashing drum rolls and flashing lightning, she and Desrosiers, now in a boat, are hopelessly lost in a tidal wave at sea. They drown in blackness and silence as the *Bad Weather* ends.

The Fool's Table lures the audience into the frightening world of madness. It begins and ends with a seven-point, luminescent sun, which rises out of darkness. Puppets become people, as people become spiritual symbols. Thirty-foot figures loom menacingly over the audience like enormous totems. The audience shudders audibly. Three rag-clad women are pursued and struck down by three skeletons. The cacophonous music climaxes as the Joker (Desrosiers) enters with two rattlesnakes entwined around him.

After the dead women are carried off, four maddened monks emerge from the wings, chanting and moaning in guttural tones. Imagine the Three Stooges in Hell's insane asylum.

The dream-like images continue to bewilder the audience. Desrosiers paints frescoes of queens in green and red costumes, a black 'chicken man', a huge papier-mache rainbow trout, a black and white crown ten feet in diameter and jugglers. Many, if not all of the images are drawn from Tarot cards, the ancient cards of fortune and mystery. The black bird (Death) pursues the Red Queen

(Love). A delirious old man in yellow, carrying two bird cages, is similar to the Hermit of the Tarot who carries a lantern. Only this character (poet Albert Gedraitus) in his delirium seems to comprehend the source of all madness. Like the maddened Lear, he raves about daylight and darkness. He wonders if love can ever escape death, if the dawn can ever escape the darkness. Can any man truly cling to his sanity? Without answering these questions, the man disappears with his bird cages although the audience senses the answers. In the final tableau, the Table of Fools is possessed by the Jester of Madness, who escapes into the awaiting sun.

Desrosiers' choreography works on two distinct levels. It is both aesthetically overwhelming and didactic. It does not beg for intellectual interpretation; a five-year-old would thoroughly enjoy the piece. However, the surreal quality



Photo by: Frank Richards

Tom Bromillette, seen here in Robert Desrosier's *The Fool's Table*, demonstrates a basic surrealist pirouette.

of *The Fool's Table* has a haunting immediacy. If Kurtz, from *Heart of Darkness*, could speak of the work, he'd probably whisper "The

horror, the horror." Desrosiers sees all, too clearly: his only escape from the nightmare of reality is through the guise of theatre.

Betrayal nothing but talking heads

MARSHALL GOLDEN

The End. It's fitting that *Betrayal*, Harold Pinter's latest film, begins with the end. That's just the type of creative innovation that you'd expect from one of this era's most brilliant existentialist writers. By opening this film with its dramatic climax and progressing backwards in time to the initial meeting of the characters, Pinter has successfully layered each scene with an ever-increasing dramatic irony and

tension. It's too bad, however, that cinematically, *Betrayal* is a boring movie.

The dialogue is vintage Pinter and the chronological backtracking works well, but as a film, *Betrayal* lacks any visual style—it's dull to watch. Mainly because it suffers from the 'talking-head syndrome.' Shot after shot after shot of people just sitting around talking. They don't do anything—they just talk.

It's not that there's anything wrong with people talking, especially if their dialogue is written by Harold Pinter, but film is above all else, a visual medium. Our eyes must be stimulated as well as our ears and this visual stimulation is what *Betrayal* lacks.

The film has approximately eight scenes and each one has various combinations of two and sometimes, three characters who just sit in a room and talk. The poor editing contributes greatly to the boring visuals as the cutting has a routine rhythm, going continuously from two-shot to close-up to close-up to two-shot, which gives the pacing a monotonous, almost hypnotic effect.

Part of the blame can be placed on the director, David Jones, for failing to direct the actors to do anything, but the brunt of the problem is the failure to make a smooth transition from the stage to the screen.

Betrayal was a play before it was a movie and adapting theatre for the screen is tricky business. Because a Broadway play already exists and especially if it is successful, there is always a tendency to want to film the

play exactly as it appeared on the stage. When making the adaptation, the more highly visual element of cinema must be accounted for. Some films successfully make the transition, films such as *Fiddler on the Roof*, and *Come Back to the Five and Dime*, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean.

In each of these films, both of which started on the stage, unique and exciting visuals combined with sharp direction to prevent 'talking-head syndrome.' It's too bad that *Betrayal* didn't learn their lesson.

The story is a basic one-man has an affair with his best friend's wife-but Pinter's unique style of writing saves it from the mundane. His sparse, slightly repetitive dialogue and his famous "Pinter pauses" accentuate the personal trauma of the characters. And, because we meet the characters when the affair is disclosed and dissolved, we feel an agony as the film goes backwards and we watch them meeting and becoming lovers. We want to cry "stop!"

The main (and only) characters in the film were Jeremy Irons and Patricia Hodge as the lovers and Ben Kingsley as the jilted husband. Kingsley's performance is one of the more outstanding aspects of *Betrayal* and with his Oscar nominated performance in *Ghandi* behind him, he is threatening to become a major acting force.

The idea is good, the writing is good and the acting is good but *Betrayal* is boring. Harold Pinter has explored existentialism to the ends of the stage, but he would do well learn the beginnings of cinema.

Later at Toronto Free Theatre

Probing reality in female relationships

J. BRETT ABBEY

Later, an actor-initiated project was originally scheduled to be staged in August, but because of certain problems it premiered last week (and runs through March 27) at the Toronto Free Theatre. Actresses Sonja Smits and Angela Gei sought to produce a contemporary play that "explored fully developed female characters in a humanistic manner."

By acquiring director Susan Wright, fellow actress Norma Renault, and set designer John Pennoyer, their aims were achieved. *Later* emerged full of the intense, vivid realities of everyday relationships. It is a play that ultimately digs at the roots of a family bound by love, hate, and dishonest honesty. In particular, it is an in-depth dissection of the feelings and emotions of a widowed mother (Norma Renault) and her two grown daughters (Sonja Smits, Angela Gei) who after going their separate ways,

spend a Labour Day weekend at their summer home on the Rhode Island seacoast.

While *Later* is not by any means a play with a significant plot, it does focus on the characters and their own uniquely embedded resentments and frustrations. By allowing the audience to see the beach in front of the house and inside the house, as well as the backyard, we are not only directed towards the characters, but firmly focused upon every action. The continual subtle sounds of waves hitting the shore, only reinforce the belief that the set is a summer home on the sea.

The strong acting talents of all three characters is enough to validate the stressful situations between mother and daughter, sister and sister. Renault's ability to paint pictures with words is often striking; at times memories are more vividly recalled than the reality ever could

have been. Geis' portrayal of the married daughter 'living in a locker room', realistically reveals the life of many a contemporary housewife.

However, Smit's neurotic daughter image remains the strongest of the three. Her fast paced, un-ending shift of emotions forms the counterpoint to which the other actresses react. In the most notable scene, Smit argues with her sister inside the kitchen. Both sisters escalate their rage to the point of screaming. It is not until Smit smashes a cup down into the sink creating the sharp sight and sound of breaking glass—that the viewer is brought back to the realization that this is merely a play being staged.

What's wrong with Corinne Jacker's *Later*? It is probably the single most realistic look at the female character, that has taken far too long to arrive. Better *Later*, than never.

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