

Man guided by voices in experimental theater piece

Spotlight: A Cupboard Full of Hate

Image: Off-Leash Area: Contemporary Performance Works

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This show begins with a livid landlady beating on the door of Monsieur Dupé, then does a nice switcheroo to show us what's on the other side. Dupé (Paul Herwig, who also conceived and directed this engaging and innovative show) turns out to be a horrid obsessive-compulsive crank who whiles away his time cataloguing his canned vegetable collection. Herwig starts out crazed, dirty, and goggle-eyed, and then proceeds to become even more so. Soon personifications of his heart and mind are battling for his redemption, and he heartily resists. These two facets of the ol' dirty bastard are set in the style of visual artist Joseph Cornell's memory boxes, which used surrealist images and nostalgic symbolism for evocative effect. Here the device conveys a sad loveliness, with Dupé's mind (Clint Jeffrey) imagined as a butler in Asian dress, and his heart (Katie Kaufmann) as a silent-film starlet. Most of the dialogue is in a combination of French and English, but in such a visually oriented work, non-French speakers will lose none of the meaning. They might, however, do well to hold on to their seats when hands begin emerging from the walls onstage, and inanimate objects begin doing little dances, in techniques inspired by the stop-motion films of the Brothers Quay. Eventually Dupé's desperate need to preserve his tiny, hateful world puts him in conflict with the parts of himself that want to be healed, and in a poignant sequence Kaufmann sweeps up the proceedings amid a joyful rain of flowers. Soon enough, though, dust and regret take hold again--in the form of words on clear plastic, which Dupé hoards greedily. The ambiguously happy ending is harder-won than most, and when Herwig steps out of his "cupboard" there's a palpable sense of journey's end. This is a work that sets out to portray a very unpleasant reality, with a desire to entertain without watering down the awfulness with which it concerns itself. With an assured blend of sound, visuals, solid performances, and what can only be called special effects, it manages the tricky task of repelling and attracting all at once. And don't miss the part with the baby doll pieces floating in the air--it'll stay with you. An assured blend of sound, visuals, solid performances, and what can only be called special effects

At once broadly comic and obsessively dark, and performed entirely in *Français*, the show takes place in an interactive set on a claustrophobic stage where ethereal visions and nightmarish images weave the threads of a story involving a broken heart and a missing child. The stage is filled with enormous Joseph Cornell-like memory boxes out of which emerge the imaginary characters of a hateful mind.