

Or You Could Kiss Me Review

January 22, 2015

By Jane Zussman

We have come to expect the fresh and thought-provoking from Peppermint Creek Theatre... and **Or You Could Kiss Me** does not disappoint. It is really more than a play. It is a poem, it is a dance, it is a trip back and forth in time. "The Story" is ostensibly about a gay couple who met in 1970s South Africa when being gay was a "crime" and their present selves looking back on their beginnings from a perspective of an impending death bed. Yet, it is not just "one of those gay plays" because the universal themes of love, and mortality and memory and imagination... apply to all couples.

Jeff Boerger and Bill Henson play the couple, but they are only part of the two characters portrayed. "Assistants" Michael Banghart, Keenan Kangas, Jordan Climie and Danny Bethea join the two to operate four abstract-yet-realistic puppets, representing the past and future versions of these two men. It is remarkable how they have been choreographed and attuned to each other to bring the puppets to life. Lauren Ezzo, as MC narrates and becomes a host of extra characters as well. (Loved her cab driver.)

This is a very "black box" show, with hardly any set, and actors all in black. We're told the unusual script (by Neil Bartlett and the Handspring Puppet Company) does not have the usual, linear, stage-direction type format. Much is left to the director and cast to create. Kudos to director Scott Crandall, the first director in Peppermint's "Launching Pad" which gives new college directors a platform. He recently earned his BFA in Directing from M. Not only did Scott "choreograph" this "poem" of a play but he also created the wonderfully realistic/abstract puppets. Scott says in his note that they are "blank slates" and "distinctly not real" which challenges/engages the imagination of the puppeteers as well as the audience.

Yardain Amron at the keyboard provides a soundtrack he improvises as he goes along, matching his music to the movements onstage. It is such an organic part of the production that I hardly noticed it as a separate element; it melded with the moods created. Even though he is sitting at the side, he is "tied" to the web of people on stage. He said the music will be somewhat different every night.

This is a short show, only about an hour... and strange... but I think it can speak to everyone, gay, straight, young, old...

Or You Could Kiss Me continues 1/23-25 & 1/29-2/1, 8pm Thur-Sat; 2pm Sun.

Miller Performing Arts Center, 6025 Curry Ln, Lansing MI 48911 (two blocks west of the Cedar/Miller intersection in South Lansing)

Single ticket prices (includes a \$1 service fee):

\$16 general admission

\$11 student/senior 65+

www.peppermintcreek.org