
"The Baltimore Waltz" Whirls Into Redhouse



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Written in 1991, Paula Vogel's "The Baltimore Waltz" is a product of a time when the AIDS epidemic had surged, and that terrifying mysterious disease was taking away so many young men. There seemed to be no answers. Now, the play's sometimes uneasy mixture of farce, fantasy, and regret is a little more difficult to pull off. While AIDS is still a scourge, the desperation and anger that fueled so much of earlier AIDS inspired art has transformed into quiet resolve.

The plot of "Baltimore Waltz" sounds like the stuff of satire. First grade teacher Anna suffers from terminal ATD, Acquired Toilet Disease, which she caught from a seat at the job. She and her brother Carl take off to Europe in a desperate search for pleasure and perhaps a cure from a shady doctor in Vienna. What follows is a flipbook tour of the Continent, flickering across the stage in a series of short comic scenes. Throughout their journey, Anna and Carl are haunted by the image of Harry Lime, the character played by Orson Welles in the classic film "The Third Man."

Vogel's play, written as a response to her own brother's death from AIDS, wears its heart on its sleeve. The pajama clad Carl looks like Wendy Darling's little brother ready to fly off to Never Never Land where you never grow old. Anna, desperate to live life fully to the very end, clings to Carl like he does to his stuffed bunny which he takes everywhere. Throughout their journey, they are followed by the shadowy figure of Lime who has both cheated death and offered false hope.

The Redhouse has assembled a winning cast. Whether flopping like a rag doll or pouting like a four-year-old, Adam Perabo is winning as the child-man Carl. Perabo, who along with Kate Metroka, who play Anna, also appears in Margaret Edson's "Wit," which is being performed in repertory with "The Baltimore Waltz."

Perky Metroka has the most difficult role as brave lustful Anna. She manages to keep Anna's dignity intact and maintain our sympathy as she is cutting a desperate swath through Europe.

As the Third Man, John Bixler literally wears many hats. Always sporting a doctor's latex gloves, he burns through the production playing assorted medicos, lovers, and basically the continent of Europe. As an older version of the little dutch boy (complete with wooden shoes) who stuck his thumb in the dike, Bixler hilariously wears the bewildered look of someone who has been yanked from the pages of a book into an unfamiliar and unsettling story.

Vogel's play whirls like a waltz moving more and more recklessly into a dizzying conclusion. Director Stephen Svoboda maintains Vogel's breakneck pace. Played skillfully but broadly, the show whips across the stage at lightning speed. The Redhouse "Baltimore Waltz" skillfully dances on the edge between cartoon and social x-ray to provide a satisfying evening of theater.

What: "The Baltimore Waltz" presented by Redhouse.

When: Seen on Friday, January 25, 2013.

Where: The Redhouse Art Center, 201 South West Street, Syracuse

Length: 80 minutes.

Attendance: Estimated 45.

Performs through: February 2. Performs in repertory with "Wit" by Margaret Edson..

Family guide: Some strong language, challenging ideas. Likely to appeal to mature high school students.

Information: (315) 425-0405 www.theredhouse.org

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