

Thursday Theatre Review: Norway.Today

Posted by Graeme Filed in Theatre September 11, 2008



Up until this Tuesday, I knew exactly three things about Norway. 1) Vikings come from there. 2) My friend Magnus lives there. Sadly, he is not a Viking. 3) It has fjords. And presumably Fords, although that's far less interesting from a tourism perspective.

But thanks to [Theatre Smash](#)'s superb production of *Norway.Today*, I know a fourth thing about the Scandinavian nation: it is home to a 2000 feet-high cliff called the *Freikestolen*. Not only is it a scenic wonder, it's also an ideal place for the historically-inclined to off themselves. And, as it turns out, the backdrop for a very interesting piece of theatre.

Norway.Today tells the story of Julie, a young woman who decides she is finished with life and plans to commit suicide. But she doesn't want to die alone. So, through an Internet chatroom, she convinces disaffected August to join her for a terminal dive off the aforementioned cliff. This all seems a little dark- and it is- but playwright Igor Bauersima uses this bleak premise to explore not so much why people choose to die, but how they justify continuing to live. Bauersima also finds a way to inflect his tale of self-absorption and alienation with some genuine warmth and humour. All in, it's a surprisingly charming script, endearing for its contradictions as much as the moments of sincere beauty it manages to create.

Director Sarah Baumann tautly directs Bauersima's somewhat rambling dialogue, pausing where appropriate to explore the script's more existential crags. There's also some clever staging on display here. Baumann's use of live video- a device in danger of becoming a bit of a cliché- is refreshing and understated. She also likes to play with perspective and space, shifting the orientation of the playing area and actors quickly. These moments don't always work, and can be a touch jarring for the viewer. Still, Baumann's *Norway.Today* manages to be both slick and thoughtful in its production.

Ieva Lucs is fantastic as Julie, a character who, in the wrong hands, could easily come off as totally unsympathetic. Lucs captures Julie's self-absorption and dictatorial verve, but manages to find enough vulnerability and wide-eyed longing to keep the audience engaged in her story. Lucs has an impressive dramatic range, and her gift for covering vast emotional ground quickly and convincingly is a huge part of *Norway.Today*'s success.

For his part, Steven McCarthy provides a nice counterpoint as the confused accomplice August. McCarthy brings a sophisticated level of detail to his performance, finding the little moments that make the character real. While Julie seems to have all the answers, August is constantly questioning his own experience and motives. This duality is a crucial part of the play, and McCarthy's take on his character's confusion makes the whole thing work.

The intriguing script, sharp direction and top-drawer performances make for an impressive sophomore production from Theatre Smash. No, it's not perfect. It occasionally stops paying attention to detail, fizzes out and loses its drive. But the production always manages to pull the audience back. And at one point, as August and Julie talk their way through the opening stages of an imagined relationship, the whole thing teeters on the brink of being transcendent.

Norway.Today continues at the Tarragon Theatre Extra Space until Sept. 21. For tickets call the Tarragon Theatre Box Office at 416.531.1827 or visit tarragontheatre.com.

Photo: Steven McCarthy as August and Ieva Lucs as Julie. By Michael Walton.

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