

Experimentation is

A Review

Experimentation is the mother of development, and Synergy has produced yet another new result from its no definition structure entitled "Bits and Pieces of a Midsummer's Night's Dream". Faced frequently with the question "What is Synergy?", the synergists have often sat and pondered it, only to come up with, 'Well, Synergy is...'. This lack of definition allows Synergy to be whatever its members want to produce, and with the members of Synergy changing with each project, it constantly evolves into new forms. Shadowscreen is a favorite child for the flatness of shadow creatures produced from three-dimensional movement under changing lights and colors can create illusions not possible in-the-round. The rich vein of shadowscreen devices is still barely scratched.

But there are no limits to Synergy as showplay or theatre or dance or mime, traditional or experimental. Rather, the interest of any synergist is fodder for the creative effort. Interest in an idea, a device, a technique, another work, a game, or a trick, anything may be the germ for a piece. And that piece may develop out of sound or silence, movement or emptiness, lights or shadows. Images and suggestions are a stock-in-trade, but that can be said of Art. Synergy, if any one thing, is that empty space from which some thing may emerge. And in this central Carolina area full of art, it is the only group of its kind, ~~enough~~ free enough of form to try any idea that someone has the energy to develop.

"Midsummer Night's Theme" is the ideas of six people performed by seventeen summer of '77 synergists. It opens quietly with a prosaic portrayal of restaurant activity (Tijuana Fats) with the dreamer-poet dancing his way through janitorial work while waitress, cook, boss, and cashier ignore and abide him. As outside viewer to this mundane experience, I kept expecting him to be tossed out on his ear. Bryce, the author of the piece and the dancing janitor, does indeed work at T.F. and the daily routine and working relationships inspired him to recreate life in a restaurant. What he has produced is a statement of the mind soaring through its fantasies in order to survive untouched by necessary routine. Bryce has created a simple metaphor. The dreaming dancer with his mop is the melody that runs through our heads in the middle of daily life.

During the next piece I could never completely dismiss the Aesop Brothers in the National Lampoon from my mind. for it was the tale of Siamese sisters in a high-wire circus family who loose out on a Doublemint contract because one twin takes it into her head the day of the contract meeting to reduce her bathing to onece a day. The fantasy is completely beyond our vusual experinece what with circus life, Hollywood contzacts, and Siamese twins, but when Scriba Whitmore, as the father, appears overhead in the ARk balcony with a balancing pole in his hands and white circus tights, it's own inner reality is indisputable as the viewer cranes his neck to watch the hih-wire artist at home in his dangerous altitude complaining about his crazy daughters. And this is the heart of theatre and of art, to create an indisputable inner reality. Jane Leserman and amirror (actually three mirrors) paly the Siamese twins. In this, the device of mirrors is well exploited. Jane begins her steady slow undulations between audidnce and mirror, joined at the hip to her reflection, and after Daddy's monologue overhead, reappears only in reflaction by the device of two mirrors facing each other (we've all done this one time or anther). Amazing, always, how more real the reflection or the sahdow seesms. The devices of reflectiøns, hypnotic undulations, and higher-than-real-life orations (Daddy), succeed in suspending our normal expecgiøns so that the fantasy can establiish its own reality over ours. I almost forgot to mention for it si most subtle and most prevalent, that meticulously produced tape of one twins version fo the stoty and the other's repy with background piano playing "Man on the Flying Trapeze" in an origanal and effective arrangement by Paul Axcher.

Third on the program is a little ditty, "The Rise and Fall and Rise of Mødern Dance" with credit due to Michzel Ching for delightful origianl ragtime music. As one Synergist said, : I knew it was an inside joke, but I didn't know the punch line," it is true that if you know the title is a serious history of modern dance, it si funny, and if you don't, it is delightful. It is a dance ~~for~~ dedicated to dancers. Suzanne White Manning, after elaborate slide credits, rises, falls, and rises.

Intermission

Intermission ends with the audience being led to the backboard of the Ark by Suzanne WM 'singing'? to one of our 20th century nonmusicians, Phillip Glass. To those of us tuning into the new kinds of electronic sounds, it is entertaining. To those who still complain about all that new noise in the music world, it would be disturbing.

Following was the highlight of the evening for me, a work by John Eyllers, which elicited memories of WoodyAllen's compendium of Russian novels, "Love and Death". It was the same gradiose tragicomedy performed to dark Bartok, a mime/dance piece, with the poet-hero, in white peasant shirt contemplating the depths of a frisbee throw him by the good frisbee fairy. Enamored by the depths he finds both in throwing the frisbee and in its surface, he is frustrated by Rod Steiger's southern sheriff who strides out and takes the frisbee away from this "effette" troublemaker. Luckily there's more than one frisbee in the sea and the good fairy, standing in the background, presents him with a nother. A monk appears and there ensues a classic battle between primitive religion and humanism as the two men fight corss and frisbee like quarterstaves. Friwbee wins, only to meet up with a bookworm who has all the answers in print, and a yoyo. Theypyo returns to the hdnad; the frisbbe travels one way and lies inert on the ground. The poet is devastated! He mourns, he cries, he laments in true dark Russian ~~fashion~~ despair, and he spurns the efforts of the good fairy to renew his fascination for the frisbee.

Here then lies the crux of a strong or a weak creation. A long involved joke should have a quick clean punch line. The answer to such an involved statement should be a sudden pleasant release from the involvement demanded. The good fairy throws the frisbee almost in frustration to the poet. He catches and throws it back. And the true nature of the frisbee is discovered as the other characters return to a frisbee throwing circle which spins its way offstage. The logical punchline you forgot is always the funniest.

A completely abstract piece is next, a study in curves and angles,

with the curves presented in shadowscreen dance made of Tai Chi; movements. About the time this statement has run its course, the angles emerge from behind a nearby tree in white ~~and/orderl~~ orderly uniforms, working their way to beside the showdow tent and become effectively co-visible with the curves. The curves really only have a single version, until they become jumbled and angular themselves, while the angles move through a number of permutations, such as office'factory workers or a machine. The tape collage is particularly well integrated, something I've been waiting to hear for a long time, Thanks.

David Mannings' radios play presented a welcome sensory rest with its invisible T.V. Tale. I felt it was conceived as an audition piece, knowing that David has strong professional aspirations as a writer, with its clean technical production and, as such, is a good presentation. As a theatre piece, it was smooth like Muzak and as easy to mentally dismiss, and although it is a standard radio ambiance, in the darkness of the theatre and especially out under the stars, it was too easy to ignore and attend to the other resting senses. Like a serial comic strip or soap opera, however, you could fill in the gaps you missed, a factor I'm unsure whether it counts as a weakness or a strength. As to his style, I feel David is still nosing around the edges of his potential and I am waiting to see if he can, indeed, approach his ideal. In terms of such an event as theatre, I am sure that silence and darkness will never be overused, making both an effect that serves admirably to expand the experience of vision and sound. It is only ^{when} sight and sound disappear that you really notice they were there. I trust David will pursue such possibilities further. It did seem to be that his writing, which seems flat in print, took on a great deal of life in sound, and that carefully juxtaposed with some of his visual ideas, may be just the medium that he'll use best.

Suzannes's last piece "Lullaby" is a replay from the Lapis Lazu, i dance concert, performed at that time with Cimopi Quartet on stage, this time with two motionless fellows and a macrame lady (from Shirley McConohay) to accompany with taped music. The quartet of dancers... (partially obscured text)

the four characters move through a series of mundane and symbolic social movements with one another, sittingⁱⁿ/or standing near a quartet of chairs. Suzanne succeeds in telling a story that can be interpreted by any number of plots, a rare achievement. Having seen this piece two years apart with two different casts maintain the same poetic line, I feel this is a small masterpiece. I feel Suzanne has more yet to come.

No thread runs through the "Midsummer Night's Theme" save the intentness with which each person told their tale, the gate they each opened to take others into their fantasy world. By exercising their definitions and their expectations, the synergists are getting a handle on the theatre as spectacle rather than our traditional theatre as word.

Interesting.

Whose?