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lady from the sea | wax factory

reviewed by
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"Lady From The Sea" at American Can Factory: Out along 3rd Street, deep within the wastelands of industrial Brooklyn, out past the truck repair garages, the welding shops, the overflowing dumpsters and the reeking canals rises the grim, grimy brick of the American Can Factory. And within its yawning 19th-Century caverns and hallways this past weekend, there occurred the most magnificent dream.

For it was here, spread out over twelve locations within and without the sprawling Can structure, that The Wax Factory put up its stunning interpretation of Ibsen's relatively little-known 1888 play, "The Lady from the Sea".

WF's presentation was not so much a deconstruction of Ibsen's text as it was a complete re-imagining, a distillation of the play's central themes of loss and longing reinterpreted and redesigned as a complementary collective of video, sound, music and dance jutting in and out and about a dank and sprawling structure to unprecedented and at times overwhelming theatrical effect:

In the lobby, a young woman struggles, suspended in a large fishing net, her occasional cries electronically sampled and played backwards through large speakers, resembling the sounds of whales;

In a room at the end of a hallway, black-clad human mannequins read watery manifestos, their green-hued likenesses captured on video monitors while across the room beyond, a nude woman drifts in a large aquarium, her languid body randomly shocked by sudden strident bursts of distorted, watery sound;

In a red fluorescent-lit elevator, a cheerful young woman in a red, archetypal attendant's uniform offers smiles, directions and rides up and down;

At the end of an alleyway, on a large videoscreen squeezed into a portal alcove above a rank, flooded basement, the grainy image of a woman in black twists slowly against a pulsating, watery orange horizon;

Out in the courtyard, two lovers in black reach for one other from opposing fire escapes. Below them, a long hallway lined with locked doors seeping a lavender fluorescence emits the murmurs of voices and the sound of the sea;

At the end of the hallway is an immense, empty cavern of a room where, on a powder-covered mat ringed with ticking metronomes, three young women in white twist and writhe slowly to a pulsating electronic drone, one occasionally breaking off from the others like some protoplasmic discharge to wander the stairways and hallways, lurching and staggering amongst the roving audience.

And everywhere, the presence and sound of the sea.

When you come out the other end, you emerge drenched not only in the sense of loss and longing that "Lady"'s protagonist Ellida -- trapped in a loveless marriage -- felt for her one-time lover, but also in what director Ivan Talijancic terms the "force that gave us life [that] will eventually come back to reclaim it."

The only regret I have about this "Lady" is that, like a dream you don't want to awake from, this Wax Factory presentation was for one weekend only.

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