

Living Room Theatre's "Adam and Evie" speaks to love

By Telly Halkias, tchalkias@aol.com

NORTH BENNINGTON — When I saw Bennington Museum director Robert Wolterstorff in the crowd at Living Room Theatre's season opener this Thursday night, I knew the stars were aligning.

Just a week earlier, Wolterstorff, a noted art historian, had spoken to me for several articles I was writing on his institution's new ground-breaking exhibition, "Grandma Moses, American Modern," which examines echoes of Moses' methods in the approach of American Modernists.

This parallel was on my mind throughout the crisp 88 minutes LRT offered up to open its sixth season, a surreal production of Charles Mee's "Adam and Evie." The play is produced by Roger Cooper and directed, choreographed and designed by Randolyn Zinn.

The connection to Modernism seems fitting. Mee, a professor of theatre at Columbia University has long written plays at the forefront of visual as well as written innovation. His narrative flow is created the same way patches are put together on a quilt, and he is particularly adept at taking existing stories such as Greek plays and fusing them

"Adam and Evie" is about the human drive for love and everything that goes along with it: it surveys this passion from Adam and Eve through today. The story revels in social behavior ranging from the juvenile, sage, tear-jerking, quixotic, and carnal longings of dozens of characters who also mix in a healthy dose of humor.

The cast of 12 young attractive actors, recent graduates from Circle in the

Square Theatre School, took the roles of Adam (Chase McIntosh) and Evie (Maranda Rust), and then were all sent through a time warp of the imagination and more characters than one can imagine.

A sampling of some roles played by the ensemble: Greek play narrator (Danielle Amendola), Tantalus (yes, from the myth, Matthew Boyd), Juliet (yes, Shakespeare's, Madison Coyle), Romeo (Holden Cox), a Chicken (yes, you heard that right, Matt Dallal), The Bride (Rena Gavigan), a Waiter (Olivia Hartshorn), a Casting Agent (Iris Holm), a Charioteer (Jay Reum), and a Violinist (Gaia Visnar).

These are just a few of the roles played by the above actors. There were about 4 times more overall, as one scene literally floated into the next. Director Zinn and husband and LRT co-founder Allen McCullough also had a dreamy dancing cameo.

Ms. Zinn had her charges primed and ready, whether in a tremendously hilarious casting call for Romeo and Juliet, or the over-the-top rendition of the myth of Tantalus, to the affair of a grand wedding.

The cast was able to make us laugh at well-timed moments: they danced with fluidity, and sung both gently and with authority. Zinn's choreography remains as good as LRT audiences have come to expect, and rightfully so given her long New York career in the industry.

A special nod must go to stage manager Sarabell Wrigley, who came to North Bennington from Los Angeles specifically to be a part of this production, her fourth season with LRT. Given the intimate staging and the pay-as-you-will ticket policy - a largesse which permeates the entire stage company — I can see why someone would want to work at LRT, let alone attend a play as an audience member.

But let's get back to my opening meditation on modern art and its connection to "Adam and Evie." There's no question a play by Charles Mee is not garden variety theatre. His work is known as innovative and visionary, partly because there just isn't a whole lot out there like it. These are not easy plays to write, produce, direct, or perform in.

As such, the chance to see this kind of quilt work of a funny, thoughtful, and quite sensual performance is rare indeed, and to see it in any kind of regional theater is almost unheard of. This, along with the superior acting of the young Thespians under Zinn's aegis, are excellent reasons to go see "Adam and Evie."

For all I had known of Mee's work, I had never seen it on stage, nor had I ever attended a show at LRT, even though many friends have been urging me to go for several years.

I'm glad I did. You will be, too.

"Adam and Evie" will run through July 14 at Living Room Theatre, Park-McCullough Carriage Barn, 1 Park St., North Bennington, Vt. Info: 802-442-5322 or lrvt.org

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