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KEELY GARFIELD

DUO MULTICULTURAL ARTS CENTER, NEW YORK

By Apollinaire Scherr

The International Ladies Garment Workers Union met in this East Village establishment (long before it was called the Duo). Yiddish-theatre idols clomped across its stage, with its gold-painted proscenium and murals of plump 18th-century ladies. Francis Ford Coppola shot a scene for *The Godfather II* here, and Andy Warhol organised porn movie nights. So why not London émigré Keely Garfield, whose MO is precisely the unlikely connection?

I will not hazard a summary of the choreographer's latest tragicomic concoction, commissioned by Duo in its inaugural year as dance producer. *Twin Pines* has nothing so straightforward as a plot. If it is about anything, it is about painful, hopeful approximation – about making use of the materials at hand, however rudimentary or plasticky, to dream oneself out of despair.

Twin Pines is organised around trees – or rather, this being Garfield, stumps. The stump symbolises the soul, the programme says – stunted, with the possibility of later growth.

The characters for the first act, in the studio above the theatre proper, include Brandin Steffensen's stiff woodman, later enrobed like a king at a coronation in a fluffy pink sleeping bag; Anthony Phillips's Zen master, coming to a bad end; dulcet-voiced folk singer and straight man Matthew Brookshire; and the indispensable Garfield.



These people attempt various metamorphoses. With coat hanger for crown and dangling shoelace as tinsel, Garfield becomes a queen, for example. The beige tool apron trailing between her legs serves as royal train. Later, a different kind of hanger (plastic and white) figures as leaves and she as a tree, rustling then wrestled to the ground and stripped by axe man and Zen master.

The performers enact these scenarios with the hilarious sombreness of a child in a skit she has learnt by heart. But the scenes do not cloy. Expert pacing and deadpan delivery guarantee that the players do not seem to be impersonating children so much as heading down the same rabbit hole of iconoclastic imagination.

The show becomes more dancey when it descends to the main theatre for "Flesh", the second act. The introduction of gorgeous dancer Omagbitse Omagbemi invites this transition. *Twin Pines'* fascination, however, depends on awkward inhabitation, the gap between the stiff little dances and the soul they are meant to invoke – and sometimes, miraculously, do. (★★★★☆)