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MARCH 17, 2008

WOMEN'S NIGHT**SOAKING WET FESTIVAL FEATURES 6**

By CLARE BYRNE

I enter the West End Theater for Soaking WET, a dance series presented by David Parker and Jeffrey Kazin and wonder, what is this space? As audience, we sit facing a semi-circular stage; huge velvet-draped windows rise above. I feel like I'm at the Globe Theater, and those drapes hide balconies of ghostly audience-members — which would mean we're the ones being watched.

In the first show of the double bill, I watch five gifted female choreographers dance solos or duets: a glimpse into each of their lives, perspectives, relationships. At the end I think, what is this show for? The answer seems to be, to give performers an opportunity to perform. What are the performers performing? They are doing what they are compelled to do, for which they need space and a show: the act that gets them to the other side of whatever gully they have encountered physically, mentally, or emotionally.

Keely Garfield's "Limerence", second in the double-bill, is a powerful doing — a ritual event for performers and witnesses in which things happen, full of risk, repercussions, wisdom, seasoned with pain and experience on both sides.

Jonathan Belcher's astounding lighting-design-as-performance in "Limerence" is explicit — his machinations translate into meaning and poetry right in front of our eyes, and turn the space back into itself. He races around the stage in the hour before the performance setting up equipment, stacking light-crates as makeshift booms, setting out a stationary bicycle: a junkyard with magical potential. Keely, Omagbitse Omagbemi, Brandin Steffensen, and Jonathan gather themselves onstage, a moment of togetherness; they begin.

Jonathan and Brandin focus huge three-foot-square spotlights on Keely and Omagbitse; they adjust to highlight the women, or throw them into relief, and their calm observance is soothing. I am moved by the sense of journey — journey that Keely has taken to India and Alaska to feed this work, and journey unfolding in time and space right here. Nothing and everything is happening. Men focus lights on women, wheeling and revolving. Keely and Omagbitse are prisoners or movie stars, searched and sought, as are we in the audience. The lighting revolves through the whole space, over the velvet windows — disorienting, dizzying.

Keely slips and falls on a jacket inexplicably, onto the floor. She breathes through her ribs like gills, waves up above us, as if to a god whose attention she desires. She and Omagbitse spit, create a paste out of rubbing their hands together, and coat each other with the paste, readying themselves. Keely slips again and brings down Omagbitse

with her — they fall repeatedly. It strikes me as the most significant act: this slip and fall on the inexplicable jacket, as the success or failure that triggers all the succeeding actions, good and bad; it makes me feel sick. They recover balance and dance powerfully. I realize I'm composing a love song of support in my notebook, semi-intelligibly translating actions which are utterly intelligible.

Keely and Omagbitse crawl in tandem on their knees — soft, strong, rhythmic crawling, which says everything. There's nothing else to do in all the world of movement. This is it. We are on our knees. We're animals, children, people in desperate need, clinging to survival. I entrain to Keely and Omagbitse's movement, and the details of each: Keely and her deliberate, serious demands of psyche, tempered by pain, loss, joy. Omagbitse, with inner fire, secretive, divine, resilient, elastic. Both submit to this crawl.

Jonathan pulls up a new palette, psychedelic mushroom patterns kaleidoscoping in circles. I giggle at this. Keely becomes funny without trying as the women perform a pas de deux. At this point, I want it to stop; there's so much information; I'm exhausted and losing the moment. Omagbitse crumples against the wall. Keely throws the coat against it. She walks dispiritedly over to the men, and engages Brandin in a duet. He rides a stationary bike as she pumps pom-poms, cheerleader-style, in a kind of ritual warm-up; he provides energy, she provides image.

They get closer and entangle hips, ribs, gills; turn into cobras and rear at each other. Keely gets bossy. The mystical journey seems to be over, it's disappointing. The duet is full of little movements, slaps and thrusts: right from the start they have to deal with each other's innuendos and discordances. It's funny to see them struggle. Keely continues to struggle even after Brandin lets go of her. She is beautiful, he is heroically, comically useless.

I finally realize right at the end of this second show what the space is, and where we all are — not quite the Globe Theater, but kind of: we are in a fish tank Keely would like to get out of. Brandin can't help her, though he'd like to, and time is passing. Inadvertently, he finds his chance. Pumping on the bicycle once again, Brandin becomes the horse, Keely the charioteer standing on the seat, pointing to the god up and over us. Her own shadow, highlighted by Jonathan, stretches to the far-up reaches of the room.