

A Discovery at Last

San Francisco International Arts Festival: Rachael Lincoln and Leslie Seiters' *An Attic An Exit*, Shlomit Fundaminsky's *Inner Pocket*, Leyya Tawill's *LAND* (excerpt), *Capital Life*

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Lean To Productions in *An Attic An Exit*.

One of the perennial thrills in attending arts festivals is coming across a work that had never registered strongly in the blizzard of pre-festival publicity. After the hype, comes the discovery. So it has been with the fifth San Francisco International Arts Festival. There was little buzz before hand about Lean To Productions' *An Attic An Exit*, but the premiere of this 50-minute dance theater work (more mime than dance) at Dance Mission Theatre Friday (May 30) proved a rare pleasure and, for this festival habitu , one of the highlights of the past two weeks.

Lean To is the joint company of Rachael Lincoln, who currently performs with Project

Bandaloop, and Leslie Seiters, who teaches at San Diego State University. These long-time collaborators here cavort through a domestic tragicomedy with a wit, focus, invention and genuine charm, qualities that have been in somewhat short supply this past fortnight. That the duo deploy all the elements of theater—music, props, costumes, even their matching dyed blonde coiffures—in the service of their quasi-narrative and make those ingredients mean something removes this opus from the slapped together state of some of the other festival entries. These people actually have respect for their audience.

An Attic An Exit may be a fable about two sisters or two lovers, or perhaps, two warring factions of the same personality and about how one half of that dichotomy finally establishes her individuality. Clothing and household objects clutter the performance space. At the start, Lincoln and Seiters, both barefoot and topless, slip into matching peajackets, suspended from the rigging. They travel the space and they gesture in unison. Two suitcases (an object I had previously hoped I would never see again in a performance piece) figure prominently. No reason, however, to scream "cliché alert"; a dancer extracts a long rope from the valise, and wanders off, trailing the cord, which binds her to her mate and to the household.

Later, after a crash of crockery, that rope will metamorphose into a clump of spaghetti; later, too, the couple will sit down to dinner, their table demarcated by trails of sugar. Everyday objects suddenly acquire totemic properties. An array of duct tape stuck on the floor is raised and becomes a door frame. Another rope is transformed into a string of pearls, but not for long before it changes again. This pair knows their Looney Tunes.

Seiters and Lincoln move through this dream landscape with eminent good cheer, terrific empathy and without once playing their hand. There's theater magic here, conjured in part by Tyler Crosser's wry score, amended by bits from other composers, *An Attic An Exit* will play Los Angeles' Unknown Theater July 17-27. However, it also deserves a second Bay Area run.

Earlier on Friday evening, Israeli dancer-choreographer Shlomit Fundaminsky and San Francisco's Dance Elixir shared a program, although their styles couldn't be more dissimilar. Fundaminsky had originally planned to perform a duet, *Skid Marks*, but the illness of her artistic partner yielded a change of program.

Not to worry. In *Inner Pocket*, the choreographer has fashioned a consistently gripping solo for herself. Fundaminsky appears an artist who signals a specific emotion with every gesture. This woman takes us through 24 hours in her life, set to recorded bits by Rachmaninoff, Schumann and others. The episodes would seem to include lovemaking (Fundaminsky wraps an arm around herself, a recurring image), rejection and acceptance. There's terrific physical humor here. Fundaminsky adopts a silly walk around the perimeter in the course of which her head seems to disappear into her torso. John Cleese would be proud.

We are also regaled with a simulated defecation scene. I appreciate the fact that Fundaminsky was trying to illustrate her quotidian routine in detail, but this was a case of way too much information. Incidentally, SFIAF boasted two of these elimination episodes delivered by two different artists within 24 hours and that was definitely two episodes too much—unless, perhaps, executive director Andrew Wood is seeking underwriting from Charmin next year.

Dance Elixir brought a welcome exhibition of modern dance technique to a festival that, on occasion has seemed to be about everything but real dancing. The limited DMT space seems to inhibit Tawil's six dancers in these release-based works, of which *Capital Life* was a premiere. According to the press kit, the décor was omitted, and it all looked rather bare bones for a festival. The annoying techno-pop scores were alienating factors. But Tawil's angular combinations hold much promise, though the choreography keeps everything on a cool, formal plain, without the emotional inflections that might involve the viewer on a more personal level.

The dancers, of varying technical accomplishment, included Jeremiah Crank, Janet Das, Jacqueline Lounsbuey, Marlena Penny Oden, Ken Scott, Erin Mei Ling Stuart and Isabelle Sjahsam. Nice, but I failed to see what it was so special about Dance Elixir's works that warranted inclusion in an international festival.

One suggestion for next year. It might be wise to stagger the same performers over two weekends, so, if Wood has something really hot to show the community, word can get around. Still, despite my qualms about certain companies, and considering the substantial crowds at most performances, SFIAF is clearly deserving of major underwriting by the city agencies and the other sources who dole out the dollars for these projects. If only to aerate the provincial mindset that sometimes lingers like a miasma in the local arts community, those dollars will be well spent.

SFIAF continues through next weekend at various venues around town. The festival winds up Sunday at 2 p.m. in Yerba Buena Gardens with a free concert by Omar Sosa and John Santos.
