

ECHO AND NARCISSUS REVIEWS – London Fringe, June/July 2003

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The Stage

July, 2003

HEADLINE: REVIEWS

BYLINE: Theatre

BODY:

ECHO AND NARCISSUS

White Bear, London

June 24 – July 13

Director: Jonathan Heron

Producer: Ric Watts

Cast Includes: Lucinka Eisler, Antonio De Gregorio, Finnian O'Neill, Fiona Marr, Zoe Simon

Running Time: 45mins

Ovid's tale of Echo and Narcissus has been repeated, reflected and metamorphosed throughout history. Fail Better Productions, rigorously directed by Jonathan Heron, decided to transform the classical myth as never before using a devised text and focusing on the similarities between Ovid and Beckett.

The result is abstract, poetic and closer to installation art than to narrative theatre. It will not satisfy those seeking a beginning, middle and end but in its own ambitious terms it works. It is challenging, gripping, creative and the acting is assured.

As in Beckett, Ovid's characters are trapped in absurd, tragic roles, tinged with the ridiculous. The women especially struggle to get out. Naomi Everall's pleasantly mildewed set provides a watery leitmotif as a subversive drip drip drip fills one of the cabinets in Narcissus' office. Finnian O'Neill as one of the two Narcissi sits perched on another, scribbling frantically as Lucinka Eisler, one of three Echoes comes to help.

Help means repeating anything she has heard. Sometimes it is banal, sometimes striking, sometimes funny, ultimately poignant. Eisler makes us feel Echo's pain, as fated only to repeat she cannot communicate her love to Narcissus.

Narcissus dismisses her and sobs, squawks, squeaks and promptly falls for his mirror image (Antonio De Gregorio). Zoe Simon now portrays an Echo transformed by grief, who can barely move or speak but for a brief, eloquent outburst echoing Fiona Marr's earlier highly emotional Echo. As in Beckett, we rejoice momentarily at such expansion after so much savage denial.

Barbara Lewis

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July, 2003

HEADLINE: Theatre: Review

BODY:

'Echo and Narcissus'
White Bear, fringe

The story of Echo and Narcissus is one of the classic tales of unrequited love. Echo, the dumbstruck nymph who can only repeat what others say, falls for Narcissus, the unreachable beautiful boy. She wastes away til she is just a voice. He sees his reflection in a pool and, smitten, stays there until he too dies. Fail Better Productions see in the story material for their Beckett-inspired devisings. What they make of it is a short, visually arresting piece that will have you scurrying back to your Ovid – if only for clarification.

Their main addition to the story is to give Narcissus a job, as a clerk in a dingy grotto – beautifully designed by Nomi Overall, with water dripping from slimy filing cabinets. His task of transcribing snippets of conversation from 'out there' is the perfect opening for Echo, who brings him back eavesdroppings. 'Leave the lady's arm alone, David', 'I'm dark, I've let the bleach grow out', 'This is a security alert'. Thus far we are in the opaque, fitfully intriguing world of companies like Forced Entertainment.

Director Jonathan Heron and his cast of five are hampered by their numbers however. The need to split characters to give everyone something to do, lessens the conceptual impact. But with fine performers like Finnian O'Neill and Zoe Simon, I have no doubt they will live up to their company name.

Jonathan Gibbs