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"This is How I Don't Know How to Dance"

Directed by Leon Ingulsrud and SITI Company



Compiled and composed by SITI Conservatory Artists

Review by Daniel Glenn

Stop me if you've heard this one. Twenty strangers walk into a bar. The bartender says, what is this, some kind of play?

It is, and these twenty strangers are students of the SITI Company's newly formed Conservatory. The play they have all collaborated to construct finds them in Grand Central, or somewhere like it, in the midst of an apocalypse. The outside world is gone, they're told, and all that's left is how these individuals will carry the mantle of humanity.

It may put one in mind of *No Exit*, Sartre's famous play about three souls trapped in the hell of each other's company. Luckily, this is a much friendlier limbo. With a marked lack of despair, these kind folks pass the time presenting episodes and thoughts from their lives and dreams. It is clear that some of what we see on stage is a representation of the process the students went through in getting to know each other as colleagues.

The work of SITI Company is known for its physical style, and the precise movements of the Conservatory artists reflect that. They are consistently present and alive in their bodies from their heads to the bottoms of their feet. There is always an intelligence to the layered stage compositions, and the gesture-based choreography throughout the piece is evocative without being illustrative. A highlight is the hypnotic group sleep dance, elegant in its simplicity.

The text itself is uneven. Some of the anecdotes and aphorisms come off as overly earnest, or as clichés. In addition, nearly all the lines are declaimed, spoken loudly and boldly to the audience. This gives everything equal importance, so that after a while nothing has any. Yet some of the actors fare better than others, and a few solos break through with real emotional involvement.

Yes, the group decides, they are surrounded by catastrophe. But then, "life is catastrophe," and that's never stopped mankind before. "This is How I Don't Know How to Dance" is a celebration of the journey without a map, and the question without an answer.

"This is How I Don't Know How to Dance" runs through May 10 at TBG Theater, 312 W 36th Street, Manhattan. 212-868-4444; SITI.org.

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