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Zombies and Fragile Lovers

Dumb Dumb Bunny is Operatic Butoh on a Music Video Set

By QUINN BATSON

Sam Kim's evening-length "Dumb Dumb Bunny" gives us an impressively dismal world of zombies and missed connections that veers from music video to butoh. Sometimes it's excruciating to watch and sometimes it's really entertaining, which lends the whole piece a feeling of suspense and anticipation. Throw in really good contact duets, scary scaffolding as a set and excellent music choices mixed with silence, and there is more than enough to digest and enjoy.

Kim uses the raw and vertical space of The Kitchen well, with a set that looks like one from 1980s music videos. Bare-bulb lightstrips that can be individually blinked and dimmed give the lighting bombast and power or smoky darkness. Zombies, a la Michael Jackson's "Thriller", kick the night off with campy humor and set the stage for creepiness and death.

The core of the evening is the strangely conflicted duet of Michael Helland and Miriam Wolf that eventually plays off the more peaceful duo of Kim and Liz Santoro, almost a juxtaposition of the struggle between men and women and the easy if tenuous compatibility between women.

Before arriving at those duos, though, "dumb dumb bunny" goes through huge mood swings of manic club dancing and catatonic post-disaster scenarios. Characters magically appear from gloomy light though there is no space to hide on stage, a nice trick of lighting and choreography that

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reminds us how easy it is for an unobtrusive or retiring creature to get lost and ignored in a crowd, the "bunny" of the title who may or may not adapt to the noisy crowded environment and may or may not survive.

The quiet and silent moments of the show are stretched, and then stretched, and then held. Watching up to a dozen limp bodies on stage for more than a couple minutes is an audience-tester, but ultimately an effective one. Sometimes everyone wakes up very slowly, and sometimes they have a collective seizure of violent shaking that is either death throes or a violent awakening.

Meanwhile, the scaffolding serves as an element of danger and adversity, often with a couple of flopping bunnies on the verge of falling off.

Interspersed throughout, there is the doleful or longing gaze, sometimes from one group to another, sometimes from one person to another, and ultimately from a slowly turning Sam Kim to the audience.

"Dumb dumb bunny" manages to be a sad piece full of life and humor, almost operatic in scope and scale.