

thINKingDANCE

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A Religious Exploration of the Body

by Whitney Weinstein

Slip, slide, slap, and thwack. These were the resounding noises of the dancers' bodies in Jasmine Zieroff's *The Back Door*. The religious space, a former church in South Philadelphia, was transformed into a playground of artistic eroticism featuring techno music and lawn chairs: artists meet exotic dancers meet acrobats.

Brian Sanders of JUNK is in his second year of creating work under the pseudonym Jasmine Zieroff. The program notes exposed his identity, explaining his interest in creating work without strings attached to his past artistic creations. This has been particularly useful in his choreographic role in gentlemen's clubs and in exploring new ways of working with women. This six-person cast incorporated an equal share of male-bodied and female-bodied performers, but don't be misled. Pairings did not match expected gender roles, which were shown with flat affect and a highly sexualized stride.

Whoosh, thump, hump, and smack. These were the resounding noises of oiled bodies against each other, people falling from the sky on bungee cords, and wet, phallic props splashing against stomachs. The women dominated the men, rhythmically bumping them from behind and climbing on top, demonstrating back bends of unbelievable core strength which could only have been inspired by the dirtiest chapters of the Kama Sutra. At one point a man lifted his tutu to expose a pussy puppet, sharing puffs of a cigarette with his lower lips.

Each segment of the performance followed similar thematic elements of seduction, religion, and sodomy, occasionally releasing the potentially discomforting tension with humor. A character clothed in a draping robe and carrying a microphone as a staff facilitated the progression of the show. It was unclear how some of the spectacles were connected: a writhing woman in a spotlight, a baby being circumcised, the hug of two naked lovers.

Thump, splat, squeak, and scrub. These were the resounding noises of a large plastic cube being lowered to the runway-looking stage to create a boxing ring where two dancers, braless in cut-off tank tops, first hit each other with flesh, then red paint, and finally a long, penis-shaped prosthetic. It was less poetic than earlier, when two women were levered into the air posing with legs wide open or wrapped around the other. Acrobatic feats on ropes and the twisting and arching of bodies through highly stylized and rhythmic

choreography accentuated the curves of their bodies. There was no breath of pleasure or hint of joy. They continued, emotionally unaffected, with grace and openness, through the aggressive scenes.

Although the message was vague and at times discomfoting, the experience of watching these bodies as a means of Sander's expressive exploration was certainly unforgettable.

The Back Door, Jasmine Zieroff, 2036 Montrose Street, September 5-8, 11-14, 17-20, <http://fringearts.com/venue/the-back-door/>.

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