

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Lindsay Browning

Dear Megan Mazarick and Mason Rosenthal of "Mining the Mine of the Mind for Minderals,"

by Annie Wilson

Dear Megan Mazarick and Mason Rosenthal of *Mining the Mine of the Mind for Minderals*,

Wow, you really threw yourself fearlessly into the murky topic of human consciousness. I admire that greatly - it is not always with such a sure hand an audience is led through a difficult subject. What was most impressive about the night was the way set and improvised material melted into one another. I had a teacher who would repeat, relentlessly: "Improvisation should look composed, and composition should look improvised." I saw a great deal of that on Wednesday's opening night performance, from the very first moment to the last.

So the audience sits on the floor, like kindergarteners ready for class. Stage manager Christina Gesualdi hits the wrong light switch, turning the lights up brighter, and then switches the right one off, and the audience, giggling, awaits the show. It begins with two multi-colored strobe lights flicking in rhythm, in silence, reflecting off the far wall. Whoah. Trippy. Is that what you're doing? Hypnotizing the audience first before beginning the piece so we are all in the vaguely blissed-out, stoned alpha state necessary to receive this information about the nature of human consciousness? Then darkness again, for a moment... two moments... Ah, yes, consciousness is like that, isn't it? We exist mostly in darkness, with brief moments illuminated by colorful, bright lights, only to disappear again, leaving us confused... Oh wait. Gesualdi and Rosenthal come from the offstage room, apologizing. Technical difficulties! Sound designer Michael Kiley disappears offstage, while Mason, you introduce yourself and explain that you have night blindness. Mazarick leads you offstage, and we are swathed in darkness again. Giggles ripple through the audience and grow into waves as the show starts for real and the two of you emerge, lit by the strobe lights, leaping onto the ledge that wraps around the room to Kiley's brilliant sound design of J-poppy, new-age techno.

The lecture-demonstration begins. I love the way you rapid-fire important information about the development of the theories of consciousness, acting out what you are describing as you say it, like a live animation. For example, when Rosenthal lectures, Mazarick embodies the voice in your head that instructs you to check on the audience, talk slower, point over there, talk faster, to the point that Rosenthal transforms into a wild animal, throwing both of you across this very thin ledge. As kindergarteners might be, we are rapt. You make difficult concepts accessible and hilarious. You reference your night blindness and technical difficulties with such ease I question whether there was actually any sort of technical difficulty or if that was just part of the show.

My attention wanes when we watch a puppet show about animals, but when you lead us into the next room, where people are dressed up as the very animals you describe, I am back on board. Ryan Kelly's boar, turkey, and bear costumes stun with their detail, and special props to Stuart Meyers as the Zen moth.

After only a moment with the animals, you launch into a duet, which I learned later was improvised, but appears set. You remix gestures you introduced in the lecture portion of the performance, and riff off each others' images. My personal favorite is when you announce, several times over, "I'm meditating right now. I'm meditating right now." There is never a moment when you look like you really don't know what to do next. All the uncomfortable choices, that don't quite work out the way you might expect, look completely choreographed, as if in rehearsal you said, "OK, now I think in this moment I need to acknowledge Mason's privates on my thigh. Remember that." I wonder what the duet is saying about consciousness. Is naming each thing that you are doing expanding the space between thoughts or compressing the stream (or storm) of thoughts so that there is no space in between? Is this just another illustration of the voice in our head micromanaging us, naming things as quickly as possible?

When we enter the next room, your pre-recorded speech reminds us that you are simply reminding us of what we already know. I'm ready for more, to go deeper, but you exit outside, where the animals from before roam about. A satisfying moment is when passersby accidentally become part of the performance, and once again, we aren't sure if it's intentional or not. The woman next to me is positive the cameo is performed not by chance, but by hired actors. That is the end of the show, and it comes all too soon. Maybe I was hoping you would teach me something new, which might explain that despite the joyous, satisfied look on everyone else's face, I feel a bit like I have spiritual blue balls. Or maybe I could just watch you play for hours in this absurdist, ironic-but-not, playground of a subject that is so important to being a human.

I do hope that technical difficulties continue to happen throughout, seriously, because it was truly impressive to see the way you opened your performative arms wide enough to allow for the unexpected while also delivering a very carefully rehearsed and performed show. It takes an expansive, huge consciousness, to live in the structure of a performance, as opposed to clinging to it. Which is what life is like, right? We have our rituals and habits, and then we have the chaotic nature of life. And it helps to open our arms wide enough to allow for the unexpected decisions, technical difficulties, random passersby to not only not throw us off course, but to enrich our experience of living. Thank you for that reminder.

Annie

[Mining the Mine of the Mind for Minderals](#), 9/21-22, Jolie Lade Gallery, 224 N. Juniper St.

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