

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Reinhard Werner

Life and Times: I love it, I hate it

by Annie Wilson

Nature Theater of Oklahoma's production of *Life and Times: Episodes 1-5* is surely a provocative production. I attended Episode 1 Tuesday evening and Episode 2 Wednesday evening at the Wilma Theater. The full five episodes are twelve hours long and will be shown in marathon format on Saturday, September 14th.

The conceit of the play is this: Directors Kelly Copper and Pavol Liska interviewed their sound designer, Kristin Worrall, asking her to tell her life story. This story, about growing up white and middle class in Rhode Island suburbs, took over sixteen hours. Liska and Copper whittled the story down to twelve and theatricalized it.

Episode 1 clocked in at three and a half hours with one intermission. Nature Theater company members sing the verbatim text of Worrall's interview, including every single "but," "um," and "like." They include tangential stories, fragments of stories, and brief images. It is a three hour opera of recitative. Other company members sit in front of the stage, as if they were in a pit, playing the most tuneless, mind-numbing music imaginable on a piano, flute, and ukelele. While the actors sing about Kristin's earliest memory of seeing her father's elbow above her as he changes her diaper, they "dance." They perform the most boring, painful to watch choreography you could imagine. Imagine stick figures. Imagine five year olds. When they are not singing or playing instruments, performers gaze at audience, communicating without expressing. The house lights rarely go all the way out. We are on the hook. They are keeping us on the hook in case we might want to check out from this painfully boring opera. When people leave, as they always do, they (and thus we) watch them go. They are daring us to walk out.

You would think that someone singing a stranger's circuitous life story while performing truly horrid choreography to a tuneless, wandering melody would be torture. And at times, I felt tortured. But somehow moments of transcendence appeared. The story about Kristin's brother drawing small birds all over the cover of the book she authored as a six-year old called *The Lonely Owl* drew belly

laughs from me and tears from other audience members. I remembered along with this woman my most mundane young memories. And by reliving them with a group of people in a theater, I experienced a strange catharsis. Life is mostly painfully boring, and yet from this long slog of time we call a lifetime weird moments of whatever you want to call it--catharsis, transcendence, joy--are possible. The production made me curious about this woman's uneventful life, something she could have never done had we met at a party. And as grueling as watching the show is, I keep wanting to go back.

Life and Times: Episodes 1-5, Nature Theater of Oklahoma, The Wilma Theater, September 10-14 in [FringeArts](#).

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