

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Felicia Graumann

Narwhals Ply the Rowhouse Fringe

by Jonathan Stein

Grace Mi-He Lee and Leslie Elkins, dance veterans of the Philadelphia scene, set their work, *What Narwhals Talk About When They Talk About Love*, in Lee's living room of her small home on Montrose Street in South Philly in the on and off tradition of the Rowhouse Fringe.

In a refreshing send-up of Festival hierarchies and conventions, the artists sent this introduction to the show out via Facebook:

- “1.) our show is short (25 min.), cheap (\$5), and funny (cause I say so).
- 2.) there will be no audience participation
- 3.) the seating is seriously comfortable
- 4.) there will be no Q&A with the artists after the show, instead we will enjoy thick slices of ice cream cake.”

Donning costumes by Heidi Barr of a projecting narwhal tusk, heads sheathed with long greyish wigs and dressed in silvery shifts and culottes, Lee and Elkins played off the eccentricity of this “unicorn of the sea” in a fun, narwhalean take on iconic pop songs about love from the Beatles, Led Zeppelin and others.

In a talk show setting that one might dub “Fresh Sea Air,” I was delighted that the one question that I had on my mind was asked by a guest starfish (half-naked in jock strap), who queried, “Is it hard to be in love and intimate with that tusk always in place?” The answer was not forthcoming from this pair, remaining forever a secret of the Arctic waters.

Lee and Elkins nicely interspersed their sketches with some ballet steps and torso gyrations but might have brought more quirkiness and humor into the body and movement as was done once with a series of head turns. Unfortunately too many jokes sank to the ocean's bottom.

Their Buddy Holly song shouted out, "It's so easy to fall in love," but it's not so easy to make comedy even with the strange antennae shooting out of your head.

What Narwhals Talk About When They Talk About Love, FringeArts, 731 Montrose Street, Philadelphia, added performances Sept. 24, Oct. 8, leslieelkins47@gmail.com

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