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Photo: Ilan Bachrach

Jean & Terry: Venturing Out of the Ordinary

by Janna Meiring

Jean & Terry: Your Guides Through Dark, Light, and Nebulous is a multi-layered trip into the idea of Universal Consciousness. Through dark humor, mirrored clouds, floating heads, and new-age-dancing-gurus, the style of the show invokes a mid-century era punctuated with an 80's music video flare. It interlaces monologue with lecture, artful live video feed, and fresh music composition to offer a dream-like vision quest that doesn't let the audience merely spectate.

As we enter, artist Melissa Krodman sits in a chair on a bare white stage as Jean, her self-proclaimed alter ego. She is a housewife of a by-gone era. Her right leg is crossed over her left, one arm casually propped on the back of the chair, the other discreetly resting on her lap. The background projection, a collage of multi-colored pastel blocks, suggests immense mountains and a scattering of trees, moving almost imperceptibly.

The non-linear narrative of the piece revolves around Jean. The details of her mundane life and her secret cosmic self unfold seamlessly through clever crafting of text, theatrical elements, and physical control. Krodman's voice expresses age and agelessness, time and timelessness. "Which reminds me of a story," she begins, launching into a pithy anecdote of a moment with Terry, her spirit guide. Each story teaches the grander realities beyond our daily occupations.

Two men (Jaime Maseda and Mark McCloughan), dressed in muted purple tones, provide interludes to Jean's stories. They look directly at the audience and smile—as if they are not human, but in human bodies, showing us an expression we can identify. Their presence is awkward and uncoordinated, yet delightful. It's never stated, but I feel that they embody the Nebulous world—the unseen spectacular, or what is beyond our understanding. They perform ritualized gestures, accompanied by sounds of birds and crickets. This soundscape morphs throughout the show into discordant synth tones that somehow feel harmonious.

Periodically, all of the lights blast into extreme brightness, including the lights directed at the audience. Kelly Bond, the second half of this [artist-collaborator-duo](#), steps to center stage. Wearing a bright lemony-green dress, she smiles at us the way people do instinctively with a baby—eyes and mouths wide—and stretches it wider and wider still. Aside from this extreme expression, she lectures in a neutral, non-theatrical tone. I am unsure if she is portraying Terry or simply another component in the collage of guides and gods that make up this world. She invites the audience to consider that we are *made* of light, and leads us through short meditations to shift our self-perception as solid matter to that of spacious energy.

It takes practice, as illustrated by Jean's continued struggle between depression and revelation. "It's as if I don't matter at all," Jean says in one account. "Oh, dear. You only have that half right," Terry says. "It's that you ARE not matter at all."

Jean remains in the same position for the duration of the show, but the stage and projections fluctuate between stillness and activity, darkness and light. Her pose mirrors the solidity of her perception. As she expands her awareness of universal consciousness, small gestures of her body parallel the breaking down of fixed perceptions.

She tilts her head steadily from side to side during one story. Later, both arms float up and hover in the air. Her lower limbs lift from the floor momentarily, and a rhythmic repetition of arm gestures lead to her eventual rise from the chair. "We are perceivers. We are an awareness. We are not objects. We have no solidity. We are boundless," she repeats as the music builds and her voice becomes less audible. The guru-men revolve around her, and the screen displays layers of glitter, pastel mountains, and floating singing heads. It's an upbeat-mystic-pop-sensation-finale (a la [Talking Heads](#)) as she breaks away from her socialized-human form.

As Jean reflects on the sadness she felt on a particular day, Terry says, "There's nothing you can do but raise the vibrational frequency of your heart." This is what I sense the artists are trying to do with this piece: raise our vibrations. In the face of darkness that we might experience in our ordinary lives, this show offers a sparkling venture beyond the concrete ... and, hands over some tools to take along for the journey.

Jean & Terry: Your Guides Through Dark, Light, and Nebulous, Kelly Bond and Melissa Krodman, FringeArts, November 17-19, 2016.

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December 1, 2016