



BWW **Reviews:** Rosie Herrera Dance Theatre Takes NYC by Storm with **VARIOUS STAGES OF DROWNING: A CABARET** at the Joyce

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Rosie Herrera Dance Theatre made its New York City debut as part of *Focus Dance*, a festival held annually at The Joyce Theater in conjunction with the Association of Performing Arts Presenters (APAP) conference. The objective of *Focus Dance* is to market the selected dance companies to an audience theoretically full of dance presenters from around the world. But if you ask any dancer who knows, APAP tends to be a major bust, costing an obscene amount of money for the rare lead. APAP does, however, make for a week packed with dance performances at very reasonable prices, just as the holiday cheer is starting to wear off. **Rosie Herrera Dance Theatre** was an eccentric little gem in the middle of the desperation, frustration and repeats that often become the reality of the APAP conference.

Rosie Herrera Dance Theatre was anything but cautious, reserved or subtle for a first-timer. Hailing from the hot city of Miami, the company presented "*Various Stages of Drowning: A Cabaret*," a work as vibrant in color as it was in character. Initially, there were several unrelated personalities scattered across the stage, each making his way through what seemed to be a kind of warm-up, all specific to the needs of the character, and none making a great deal of sense to the outsider. One woman stretched sensually in a large claw-foot bathtub. Downstage left at a table a man and woman, wearing formal evening attire, sat across from each other. Every few minutes a blast of water would shoot across the table into the woman's face, wetting her hair and ruining her dress. She would leave the stage and return in a new evening gown just for the sequence to begin again. It is clear that Herrera, whether intentionally or subliminally, gets some of her gumption from the iconic work of the late Pina Bausch.

Many original characters make brief cameo appearances throughout the cabaret. There is a conflicted duet between two men performed to the music "*Baby It's Cold Outside.*" A drag queen climbs a ladder to reenact a *Titanic*-inspired parody of Celine Dion's "My Heart Will Go On," complete with chicken-like chin thrusts, box fans dragged on stage with extension chords to blow her hair back and a grand finale of diving off the ladder in a scuba suit into the arms of two assistants. There is an eerie moment of the aforementioned bathtub being wheeled across the half-lit stage with a baby standing inside. A tiny woman dressed in all pink is carried around the stage by three men and then dropped consecutively on ten cakes, all placed on stools around the stage. Her reaction becomes increasingly more disturbing until she is plucked off stage, hysterical, by an unknown figure. A male member of the cast, also dressed in pink, then relives this scene, but not at all upset by being dropped in the cakes--- he finds the experience rather inappropriately enjoyable.

These brief clips of performance made "Various Stages of Drowning: A Cabaret," well, a cabaret. The work was concise, yet, again in the fashion of Pina Bausch, increasingly bizarre and dark. There was a feeling that something was going on behind the scenes; it may have been a secret, but all of the performers seemed to keep gradually spilling the beans.

The final moments of this performance resonated with an atmosphere that seemed quite literal, yet beautiful, tender and, beneath it all, metaphorical. As the drag queen rested with the back of her head on the bathtub's ledge, a maternal and unassuming cast member began to wash the heavy makeup away from her face, slowly revealing the person beneath it all. It appeared an arduous task, but the maternal figure persisted until her face was clean, the entire cast of misfits looking on as she worked.

It is my hope that Ms Herrera and her vivacious cast felt welcomed by the city. Their presence was a breath of tropical air amongst the sometimes-suppressive black and gray seriousness of New York City's modern dance. While there were a few technical difficulties, they did not hurt the performance in any way.

I look forward to seeing ***Rosie Herrera Dance Theatre*** again. A company that is so innovative, searing and disturbing bears repeated viewings.