

# Dan's Papers

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DAN'S PAPERS,

## review: behold and reflect

If you take one part dramatics, one part poetry, one part performance art, and throw in a bit of magic, you might have some idea of what Maria Pessino's *Behold and Reflect* is like, though you'd only have a partial idea. There's also a bit of insanity, a touch of carnival and more than a wee bit of illusion.

*Behold and Reflect* is billed as "a celebration of the summer solstice," but being in the audience, it is hard to keep that in mind as characters enact a series of tableaux which seem only lightly tethered to the ideas of "summer" and "solstice." Oh, there are trees and leaves and moons and vegetables, alright, but they're pasted together between the seams of myth and allegory. While the whole effect is pleasing, exciting and challenging to the audience, one must let go of any pre-conceived ideas of what a summer solstice celebration should be in order to enjoy this one, if it is one.

In the opening tableau, we hear a child's voice — the voice of Nyssa Eva Dickman Frank — telling us, "Life is wonderful, I want to know it all" to the sounds of her father, Steven Dickman's atonal music. In the second tableaux, Maria Pessino as Woman explains a little of what *Behold and Reflect* is intended to be.

"It's really just a matter of your faith and trust," she says in the words of Jamie Lerner. "The trip itself is what it's about." Oh. That settled, the trip begins. And what a trip it is.

There are witches and goblins, martyrs and vegetable vendors. There is a child and a man and a woman. But there is also a dragon and a couple of lemurs, which I think are spirits of the unburied dead. Unfortunately, there is no clear distinction made between the two lemurs in the program, so it is difficult to tell which lemur was which, but both Nancy Milinelli and Janice Bishop did a great job. One of them killed a lot of flies and the other did a dramatic enactment

of a Jill Bart poem entitled "The Shower."

Maria Pessino as Woman moved fluidly from poem to dance to song in various tableaux with grace and skill and amazingly equal ability. Her counterpart, S.M. Bennett as Man, had little to say, but was a powerful physical presence. This performance was his stage debut, and surely will not be his last appearance.

Diane Grotke as Gemini functioned mainly as the voice behind the character; a sort of narrator who was only partially visible and sometimes put words into other's mouths. The scene with Nyssa Eva Dickman Frank who plays Child was brilliantly lipsynced so that Ms. Grotke's words seemed to come out of the child's mouth. Ms. Grotke also did a great gypsy/witch dance in one tableau.

Painter and poet Francisco Sainz played the farmer with an Old World feeling which made his wild strawberries sound all the more delicious. If anything, his parts anchored the piece to the idea of summer.

But the star of the show was certainly 7 year old Nyssa Eva Dickman Frank. She never missed a line or a cue and had a stage presence one associates with older actors. In the program she wrote that "when Nyssa gros up she will be a dansr and a singlar and a mathr." I think she should add "actrss" to that list.

I'm sorry I can't give you a clearer idea of what *Behold and Reflect* is about. It's just one of those amorphous, ephemereal things that defies explanation. But I can tell you this, if you think the willing suspension of disbelief is what theatre is all about, you will have a good time. And if the audience last Friday was typical, adults enjoyed the work and children watched in rapt fascination. Plus you get a fortune cookie during tableau XV. What more could you ask for?

— Ellen Keiser