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The Pigeoning

Theater

Puppet shows

Various venues

Until Sun Dec 22 2013



Photograph: Richard Termine

The Pigeoning

Time Out says

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The Pigeoning. [HERE](#) (see [Off-Off Broadway](#)). Conceived and directed by Robin Frohardt. Music by Freddi Price. Running time: 1hr 10mins. No intermission.

The Pigeoning: in brief

An uptight 1980s office drone suspects that pigeons in the park are conspiring to disrupt his orderly existence in a new puppet-theater work by Robin Frohardt.

***The Pigeoning*: theater review by Helen Shaw**

Despite their anonymous black fencing masks, the ninja-silent puppeteers in *The Pigeoning* aren't the most menacing part of Robin Frohardt's eerie, hilarious, apocalyptic puppet fable. Nor are the titular puppet pigeons, despite their weird preknowledge of the end-time to come; nor are the rising waters (played by a shiny piece of fabric) that will rise to cover us all. No, the most chilling element of this not-for-kids (but admittedly adorable) puppet nightmare is its evocation of nine-to-five office mindlessness, as portrayed by our bespectacled old hero, Frank, the neat-freak drone who peers out at us from behind Coke-bottle glasses.

Frohardt's beautifully realized work fully absorbs the audience from the start. We enter HERE's miniature downstairs theater to discover safety manuals on our seats. A harried-looking fellow (Freddie Price) pops a tape into the clackety VCR, and we watch a pitch-perfect re-creation of an '80s office safety video—part 1 of 27!—complete with a demonstration of how to properly label cords. By the time our A/V helper has retired to a miniature office set stage right, we're seduced and delighted; Price (also the composer) strikes up the plaintive, inventive keyboard accompaniment for an audience already charmed.

The main event then commences: the paranoid adventures of Bunraku puppet Frank, a two-foot-tall white-collar worker stuck in a dreary workplace, reading his own manual while fighting his own obsessive neatness and the lurking suspicion that the pigeons have something to say.

The masterpiece here is Frank himself, tenderly lifted from place to place by his operators. His boggled look and his dogged grumpiness seem entirely real—it's hard to remember that he has been sculpted by Frohardt and her codesigner, Jesse “Roadkill” Wilson. He seems born to sit in his tiny office environment and on his bench in the park (near a borderline-sentient mound of New York City trash), where he munches lonely sandwiches and shrinks from the plush, persistent pigeons wheeling around his feet. Once the pigeons start following him back to work, Frank worries in earnest—his safety manual has a chapter on interspecies conspiracy—and he begins a surveillance effort that would make the NSA proud.

Frohardt and company have been finessing their piece for years, and the result is something extraordinarily integrated, burnished to a high gloss. The only thing they haven't anticipated is the runaway sweetness of their protagonist. In the program, Frohardt says her hope is that we “laugh at ourselves and our clinging to safety, order and control in the face of the end of the world.” Certainly, Frank's obsession with his manual takes him, literally, into the depths of a biblical flood. But you won't be left laughing at him. I, for one, admire him.

There's something wonderful about a character who meets terror and strangeness and his own apparent madness with planning and raft making and careful manual highlighting. What's extraordinary and endearing here (and it's appropriate in a puppet piece that's so patently about craft), is that reality barely matters. When the world goes cockamamy, you hitch your grandpa-pants up to the middle of your chest, and you come up with something productive to do.—*Theater review by Helen Shaw*