

STAGE REVIEW

Sleeping Weazel productions are powerful

By Terry Byrne | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT JUNE 23, 2014



ERIN X. SMITHERS

Beth Nixon in Sleeping Weazel's production of "Lava Fossil."

From the heartfelt to the hilarious, the second weekend of Sleeping Weazel's Doubles, Demons, and Dreamers Festival introduced audiences to two more startlingly talented playwrights who tickled both our imagination and our emotions. This past weekend's dynamic duo included Beth Nixon's "Lava Fossil," a touching ode to the sticky nature of grief, and Adara Meyers's "Talk to at Me," a wild trip to the consequences of our shallow self-absorption. Each play is rich in ambitious ideas, but both were executed with such elegant simplicity that the collection of seemingly unrelated scenes comes together for a powerful emotional punch.

With a playful collection of drawings, dioramas, and a few plastic toys, Nixon

explores her ongoing response to her father's sudden death two years ago in a monologue that is hypnotic in its rhythms and playful in its presentation.

Surrounded by a series of suitcases, which she says were some of the objects he left behind, Nixon plumbs the devastating nature of loss through the seemingly random, but oh-so-important details: the hoagie her father bought but never had a chance to eat, the graduation card he gave her with the special inside joke, the thousands of pages of research notes from his oceanographic experiments.

What makes "Lava Fossil" so compelling, besides Nixon's unaffected delivery, are her props: a series of worlds that pop up, unfold, unravel, and ultimately erupt out of the suitcases. Director Megan Sandberg-Zakian's pacing is superb as she moves Nixon deliberately from one suitcase to the next, with each stop allowing for another sly, charming surprise. Nixon's eulogy to a group of grieving dinosaurs, her fascination with the survival of the lobster, and her clear-eyed questioning of assumptions about what comes next, offer a glimpse into the deep pain of her grief and her understanding of a continued connection. The play's stunning final image is both heartbreaking and hopeful.

While the pace of "Lava Fossil" is measured and deliberate, "Talk to at Me" starts out in a frenzy and never lets up. Maggie (Margarita Martinez), Arden (Veronica Wiseman), Man 1 (Kevin Germain) and Man 2 (Cesar Munoz) sit at tables with oversize cups and saucers clutched in their hands. In rapid-fire succession, they speak in a series of non sequiturs about everything from "pro-life" people to age-defying treatments.

In the midst of the mayhem, Rat (James Barton) appears to rekindle a smoldering romance with Maggie, who is by turns attracted and repulsed by him. A single-minded sense of egotism, desire, and greed start to overwhelm the conversations as Arden eyes Man 1 and Man 2 lusts after Maggie while admitting she's out of his league. As the characters begin to paw around in the garbage, they start to change in an increasingly disturbing pattern. The end of the play is appropriately abrupt, leaving the audience spinning with silly and sad images of decay.

"Talk to at Me" is a tour de force that combines a fearless quartet of actors with Shana Gozansky's precise, disciplined direction — balancing several different things happening at once — with Meyers's zany, satirical script.

Together, "Lava Fossil" and "Talk at to Me" celebrate the elasticity of the theatrical form without sacrificing the one-two punch of emotional and intellectual stimulation.

Terry Byrne can be reached at trbyrne@aol.com.