

# Radio Play a real job well done

## Two-person tale a lesson in the value of art to life

By JOHN COULBOURN

Last Updated: 27th November 2008, 2:46am

During the debate about art and artists that preceded our most recent federal election, I received an e-mail from a disgruntled reader who suggested rather forcefully that if artists couldn't support themselves, then perhaps they should consider getting "a real job."

It was a discomfiting notion for anyone who happens to think, like I do, that making art is one of the toughest jobs going. So it was, at least initially, kind of discomfiting to find that same sort of notion at the heart of a new work from the esteemed Peggy Baker and her Peggy Baker Dance Projects.

The work in question is called Radio Play and it opened a limited run at the Young Centre Tuesday.

Created for Baker by Denise Clarke, Radio Play casts Baker as Marnie, a 50-year-old dancer who finds herself in search of what she insists on describing as "a real job" after an injury that has left her down on her luck and not only unable to work, but unsure of herself as well.

So it is that she is preparing for an interview as the show begins, at the same time as her interviewer is starting his day as well, apparently in much the same way he has started it for more mornings than he might care to remember.

He is Angus, and as played by Michael Healey, he is the quintessential drone -- a man of limited hope and aspirations, a man who, years ago, found his career comfort zone and has subsequently transformed it into a well-groomed rut.

So while Marnie worries that she has somehow been transformed into an eavesdropper on her own life -- as indeed she is, thanks to Clarke's use of taped voiceovers which effectively underscore both Marnie's insecurity and the title of the play -- Angus is simply trying to make his way to the office without mishap, juggling his morning tea ritual with a heavy sheaf of papers.

Of course, the two collide on the street long before they meet in Angus' office -- all of which adds a degree of awkwardness when they get down to business.

And things just go downhill from there, at least for a time.

In outlining her work experience, Marnie confesses she's a dancer and Angus just automatically assumes that the "exotic" is silent, engendering enough confusion and embarrassment as to render the obligatory "show me" almost a relief.

But in demonstrating her dance prowess, which Baker does to telling effect, Marnie leads Angus to re-examine his life and discover deep inside himself not just a deep loneliness but artistic seedlings just itching to break out and blossom as well.

The staging is simple -- Clarke furnishes the stage with a simple table at bar (and barre) level and uses Lee Anholt's lighting to further flesh out the environment -- while Richard McDowell's music defines the living pulse of the play.

Working with performers who have taken two wildly divergent career paths to get to the stage they are on,

Clarke makes the most of both of their skill sets, showcasing Healey's oft-demonstrated ability in playing bumbling but lovable losers and then playing it off Baker's polished movement to maximum effect.

Dialogue is simple and, for the most part, used for humorous underscoring, even though the message underlying it all -- that as long as an artist can make one person re-evaluate the world he's living in, then that artist has "a real job" -- is anything but a laughing matter.

Initially, it seems that Radio Play might be a little hard to define, rooted as it is in both the worlds of dance and theatre without being firmly anchored in either, but in the end, it's not all that tough at all.

Radio Play is simply art, and our real job is to enjoy it.

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## RADIO PLAY

The Young Centre

Starring: Peggy Baker, Michael Healey

Created By: Denise Clarke

Sun Rating: 4 out of 5