AWAKEN THE WALLS

.  Brian Lee

THE 100 – Intro to Theater , Professor Nicole Broughton

Production Essay

NOTE: *This is as an audience member who didn't have any contact with the ensemble or the process, an introduction to the world of theatre and vocabulary included therein.*

I watched a performance called *Awaken the Walls*. This was actually a performance that consisted of seven different plays/skits with two poems, one read at the start of the performance and one at the end. Seven actors/actresses took part in performing and all of them had multiple roles during the different plays/skits. The duration of the entire performance was about an hour long. It took place at the Grand Fountain in Riverbank Park in downtown Flint. “Lose something. Find something.” That was the slogan of Awaken the Walls. The entire performance was at an outdoor venue and no adjustments were made to the location as far as design, background, and lighting went. A few props were used for some of the skits but nothing that made a huge impact on the overall background or foreground of the “stage.” Everything was improvised based on the location and the production team worked around what was provided at the “set.” Since this was an outdoor event, distractions were inevitable. Bugs, outside noises, cars, and people passing by were all noises that happened during the play but the show went on as planned/scripted. There were no lights except from what was provided by nature and the sun that day. The performers did not wear any kind of costumes that were out of the norm. They were dressed in street clothes/casual wear. The actors did not have any kind of make-up on. The actresses on the other hand did have make-up on but what they wore did not stand out and could have been what they wore any other day. The audio is where the performance did have some problems with but since the performance was taking place in an outside environment, the noise was expected. During one of the plays, there was an outside distraction from a man who was fishing in the Flint River. He caught a fish and it was a walleye. I knew that because he kept yelling if any of the audience members wanted it. Of course nobody did and we all just wanted to enjoy the performance. Fortunately, it did not take very long for him to get the idea that nobody was interested in his catch. Besides the fisherman, there were also noises coming from people who were walking by who were not in the audience or participating in the play. They were pedestrians who were just walking by talking amongst each other who did not realize that there was a performance going on. Other noises came from vehicles going by along the road and insects flying around. The performance touched on every single style throughout the seven different plays/skits. The skit entitled Near/Far were about two couples who were discussing romance/love related topics. Although I don’t remember the exact words that were said, the dialog between the four individuals would qualify as melodramatic. Tangles was a skit where no spoken words were included but instead the story was told by action and movement. This skit had some of the audience members laughing so it would qualify as comedy. Telegram was a skit that had a realistic element to it. Lonely Girl was another skit without spoken words. It was about a girl who goes to various people and tries to fit in with her peers but has trouble doing so. This may make it a tragedy. Two plays called Leg Room and OMG had a combination of epic, realism, and absurd to them. Ophelia’s Fragments, which was the last play before the last poem was read, had a combination of several styles. It was the longest of the skits and may have all of the styles depending on how the audience interprets it. I would definitely say that it had at least tragedy, realism, melodrama, and maybe epic. As far as the acting went for the seven performers, I think they all did a pretty good job. Nobody stood out as a great actor but nobody was terrible either. Some of the skits that were performed that day did not include any spoken words between the characters so that makes it a little hard to judge their acting skills. However, even when there were no words, I was able to tell what was going on even with just movement and body language so the idea of what is going on is still brought to life. Even with the outside distractions, the performers were still able to carry on with the show without letting the distractions impact their performance. They knew that even with outside disturbances the show still had to go on so in that aspect, they did well. As an audience member, most of the play was enjoyable. Before going into this performance, there was a warning that the performance was not a family event but should be for people over the age of 15. There were no profanity or sexual elements however the skit Ophelia’s Fragments included an actor pretending to be a drunken father who scolds and insults his daughter. During the skit Near/Far, there was one couple who was in close proximity to the audience while the other was on the other side of the Flint River. The couple who was near was able to be seen and heard clearly but the couple that was far was barely audible from where the audience was sitting. From the title, it was clear that this was meant to be this way and even with the far couple being hard to hear, the message was clear through movement and body language. However, if there are words exchanged, it definitely would have been nice to be able to hear what they were saying to each other. I attended a talk back session with the performers and some of the audience members. Janet Haley, who was the director, was in the audience the day I saw the performance and she opened up the forum to everyone present at the talk back session to get feedback from both the audience and performers alike. The forum opened up with a statement that the performance was based on improvisations. They were meant to be comedic and spontaneous and the skits certainly were. Although this particular point brought up during the meeting was not a distraction to me, the walls that were at Riverbank Park had graffiti on them and it was a distraction to some of the audience members. The performers had even admitted that they were distractions during their practice before the actual performances took place. Overall, the performance was a new experience for me and I was able to meet some new people through it. There were talks during the meeting about having the performance again in the future so for anybody who missed out, there will be another opportunity.