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Photo: Kathryn Raines-Plate 3 Photography

Body Politics Meet Mirth, Mayhem, and Mashups in Bang

By Megan Bridge

Three performers, as if dropped in through a portal from another dimension, arrive on a stage flanked by red velvet curtains. Sarah Sanford comes first, on her belly, hands and face in the lead, down a sliding board whose starting point is hidden off stage. Next we see toes, then spike heels, then long legs clad in denim...that's Lee Etzold being flown in from overhead. A blackout and heavy metal clash precede Charlotte Ford's entrance; at "lights up" she appears astride a prone Etzold. They are all bewildered, indignant. A sign reading "Sex Show" blinks on over their heads.

Bang. It's a new theater piece conceived by Charlotte Ford, directed by Emmanuelle Delpech, co-created and performed by Sanford and Etzold. Each performer takes at least one solo over the course of the evening. Etzold's "Gail" smolders with desperation. Audience members gasp between guffaws during her high-heeled dance on a towering A-frame ladder. "Barb" (Sanford) is a nerdy muppet-clown with a mop of frizzy hair and a permanent grimace. Sanford performs a belligerent strip tease, shouting "this is not a thong! It is a full-size women's brief! I wear it because I like full coverage!" as she peels off said briefs. *Bang* purports to tackle some big questions...later in the festival Ford will sit on a panel discussion titled "Body Politics in Arts and Culture Today." I think I hear these issues being raised as "Barb" confronts the audience, telling us "I feel your gaze and it doesn't feel good..."

Ford's character, "Cheyenne," has perhaps the most depth and embodiment. A pixieish "new-age spiritualist," she chants, groans, and speaks to us from her womb, inciting us to reply ("Speak through me, I'll translate...."). Cheyenne flits and flirts around the stage with a warbling high-pitched nonsensical chant, then shifts on a dime to guttural alto grunts and wails, with both feet planted as she rocks and bucks from her pelvis. Her "lioness," a miniature stuffed toy attached to the front of her underpants, demands to be stroked, fed, teased. All three performers are incredibly skilled in their craft. This is clowning at its finest, and *Bang* is terrifically funny.

At the work's denouement, Ford bursts out of the theater, her presence replaced by a video of her, naked, fully in character, roaming the streets of Old City. The short, delightful video sequence gets more and more hilarious and absurd as "Cheyenne," in the buff, startles pedestrians, pets a dog, and orders a coffee in a cafe. Any significance that the film might have achieved, however, is overpowered by *Bang's* loud and large closing sequence, tight choreography performed to a pop-song mashup. Pop music, in fact, is woven throughout the whole evening. I believe that at root *Bang* does what it sets out to do, which is to pose some important questions about women's bodies, the gaze, and the way culture constructs sexuality. Unfortunately, these big topics are largely stifled by the audience's continuous laughter and the refrain of the culture industry. Perhaps this is conscious, an intentional comment on our struggle to find the "real" of our flesh in an existence constantly mediated by technology. But for me, *Bang's* "meaning" was ultimately drowned out by mirth, mayhem, and mashups.

Bang, Charlotte Ford. Christ Church Neighborhood House, 20 North American St, Sept. 9, 6pm, Sept. 10-12, 8pm.
http://livearts-fringe.ticketleap.com/bang/

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