thINKingDANCE
Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation

Photo: Jacques-Jean Tiziou

Pay Up - Take 1, 2 ,3

by Anna Drozdowski

By the Numbers
***Pay Up* Take #1**

$20,000	Approximate debt of Emma Arrick, UArts student and performer
$10.00	Hourly babysitting wage Emma is seeking upon graduation
1	Members of Actors Equity appearing in *Pay Up*
20	Number of shows where you have the opportunity to Pay Up
$5,000,000	Amount (to date) PNC Arts Alive has contributed to cultural programs.
3	# of PNC protesters appearing outside venue in costume (to date)
2	Minutes it takes to climb four flights of stairs to the venue
2	Minutes you have to make a decision about what you want to see
$5140.64	Total credit card debt carried by Jess Conda
$25	Hourly performance wage during *Pay Up* for APT graduates

96	Average temperature during *Pay Up* 2005
78	Average temperature during *Pay Up* 2013 (at publication time)
6	Number of scenes repeated per show
120	Number of scenes repeated throughout the festival
1	Number of dollars lent to other audience members I witnessed
4	Instances potential relationship-ending decisions I witnessed
53	Minutes remaining to *PayUp* after learning the rules
35	Approximate minutes for show cleanup, sorting & money counting
$15	Ticket to *Pay Up* in 2005
$25	Ticket to *Pay Up* in 2013
2	Number of people driven to tears at the buzzer
7	Minutes remaining on audience members meter, which she left to pay
3	Number of scenes I hijacked
5	Number of scenes I missed, after 3 performances
$150.00	Median dollars collected (above ticket sales) per performance
$2.00	Dollars stolen by this author during *Pay Up*

No Fucking Refunds
***Pay Up* Take #2**

When they work, the choose-your-own adventure scenes in the 2013 remount of Pig Iron's *Pay Up* work well and are absolutely convincing. When they don't, this collaboration with the University of the Arts is closer to Milli Vanilli caught lip-syncing and asking us to "Blame it on the Rain." But the real drama of *Pay Up* doesn't live inside the numerous white walls, rather it is in the chaotic and emotional way in which the audience members choose to manifest their destiny—plotting their attack, expressing their loss and deciding how to spend their time and money while shuffling through the experience.

Some are orderly and compliant guests who line up to drop their buck in the bucket, some are deviant patrons who take more cash out than they contribute. The sad-faced and droopy-shouldered disappointment of not making it in is countered by the illicit back-room deals that you have to wait for before they come and find you. This is the artistic version of academia's Skull & Bones—when done with skill you're suddenly in a side-room watching the Spanish language version of Dr. Chen's tele-novella. Some researchers are people-persons, having much practice in this town known for interactive audience experiences. Other be-suited scientists are clearly less comfortable with human interaction and more awkward in their offerings between buzzers.

The large choral group numbers are lush and funny, a breath of fresh air from the monotone God voice that drones instructions. We're too close to the big smiles and bouncing musical theater to do anything but enjoy the "freebie"—everyone really does love a deal. The cast commits fully to these opportunities--clearly glad of a break between each 8-minute scene running on repeat. For the performers who have been with the show since 2005 this amounts to performing the same scene more than 300 times. Understandable, then, their

exuberance about using their own voices rather than the canned mime that colors each antiseptic cubicle. These strange and surreal dance-breaks become a salve to some self-inflicted wounds when people attending as pairs come to a crossroads that leaves one partner pissed off and the other participating in Scene 27 solo.

The ballet bones in me want more attention paid to height when arranging formations—uniforms account for only so much continuity, the rest is just visual illusion. The disembodied dance of Amanda is clearest and most satisfying in the cubicle where she sells her own name to save her sanity, the secret surround-sound scene worth monkeying your way into for an acoustic experience independent of headphones.

Pay Up. Put Up. Put Out. Be Put Out. It's a performance that you'll lose out on if you're passive, or regret before it starts if you've got issues about completion. It's more about you than them, as they berate and belabor—all the while getting you to part with your Benjamins.

You Can't Always Get What You Want
***Pay Up* Take #3**

I'm penning this response from the Apple store, where I've been for 47 minutes already…waiting for the spinning beach ball on my computer screen to do anything but. I'm sitting in an all-white room, full of different islands while a staff that looks like the United Colors of Benetton buzzes about, clad in the same costume and attending to the needs of about a hundred people. I have an appointment, which I get to first by calling and confirming by email, then tracking down someone with the right tee-shirt and then by navigating a system that involves layers of pointing and smiling and being happy to help me solve my unidentified problem.

It feels like *Pay Up*. Same giant room, same frenetic energy, same process of identifying and weeding and sorting, same people trying to pay for things that they're hopeful and eager about and most of whom are unprepared for. I've purchased something that immediately I regretted, my countdown clock is ticking and I'm anxious to get on to the next opportunity. Instead I'm stuck with a good natured Bob, who tells me that my problem is probably software but he'll have to run some diagnostics to rule out the hardware issue. Were I practicing any kind of loss-aversion, I'd likely own a P.C., but unlike the monkey in the show I haven't learned that just because it looks better doesn't mean it is a better deal.

People are melting down at rates faster than their computers, everyone is running late, everyone needs to know WHEN they can have their machine back and IF they've lost all their photos forever. Did you Pay Up? Have you Backed Up? Have you paid too much and chosen poorly? Did you not understand the rules that your time has expired long ago…but you can extend it with a few more dollars. Why are those people being helped and not me? Is it warm in here? Did she cut in line? Does the buzzer go off or doom noise play in your head when you break out the plastic to pay for your shiny new toy? Cash or credit?

Sympathetic, the Apple workers and the workers in *Pay Up* are operating in a system where they're not the decision makers—though some have a bit of authority and discretion to enact some autonomy. But you'll never know the difference between a manager and marginalized hourly wage earner based on what they're wearing. The break rooms are around corners and tucked behind unmarked doors. Who is in control here? Certainly not the frazzled customers and irate couples fighting over who shouldn't have dropped their phone in the toilet or which of them didn't look back before accepting the last slot in scene 17 leaving their partner behind. The women both stand, fifteen blocks apart from one another, fuming for different reasons and frustrated at their spouses' lack of consideration.

The performers have different bedside manners and deal with varying degrees of irksome patrons and understanding accomplices willing to accept the blame. The rooms glow white and pulsing, the guards stand firm against the exit--armed with vests and walkie talkies. They've crafted purchasing experiences that are equally as conflicted about where to go, what to spend your money on, who to

talk to in uniform and whether or not what you've bought will be what you want. Dan and Steve are concerned about form and function and equally polarizing in their fields--both with armies of followers and considered crazy geniuses in the company they keep.

Pay Up. Pig Iron Theater Company in collaboration with University of the Arts. Presented by FringeArts through September 22, 2013 at the Asian Arts Initiative. www.livearts-fringe.org

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