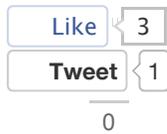


Passion And Possession Pervade EgoPo Classic Theater's A DYBBUK

Written by Arnie Finkel. Posted in **Professional Theatre** (<http://www.stagemagazine.org/category/professional-theatre/>) , **Reviews** (<http://www.stagemagazine.org/category/reviews/>)

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Published on June 02, 2012 with **No Comments** (#comments)



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Rachel Kitson and Robert DaPonte star in EgoPo Classic Theater's A DYBBUK. (Photo credit: Ian Paul Guzzone)

EgoPo is presenting the Philadelphia premiere of Tony Kushner's A DYBBUK. THE DYBBUK is a classic

Yiddish play written in 1914 by S Ansky (a pen name for Shloyme Rappaport). Kushner has taken Joachim Neugroschel's translation of the Yiddish and given the play some gorgeous flowing language and properly Chassidic lyrics. A DYBBUK is the third and last play in EgoPo's Festival of Jewish Theater. They have ended on a high note.

Chonen, a student of the Kabbalah (the mystical book of Jewish thought), is desperately in love with Leah. Sender, Leah's wealthy father, is seeking a good match for her. When he hears of the impending wedding, Chonen dies with a copy of the Kabbalah in his hands. At Leah's wedding, the ghost of Chonen enters the body of Leah and binds his soul to hers as A DYBBUK. There follows a Bet Din (rabbinical court) and an exorcism to rid Leah of the DYBBUK. All of this is done with great care to observe the proper Jewish mystical tradition. It would be a good idea for there to be a glossary for those not familiar with the terms and traditions used in the play.

The difficult role of Chonen was played with fire and passion by Robert DaPonte. As Leah, Rachel Kitson was wholly believable and lovely. I was especially taken with the way director Lane Savadore had the two of them entwined and tormented as the DYBBUK.

Ed Swidey was towering in his portrayal of the Messenger-part narrator and maybe a visitor from the Almighty. The virtuosity of the four men called Batlonim (a Yiddish term for the functionaries who attend to the ritual of the Synagogue) added greatly to the pleasure of the production. Julian Cloud, Peter Andrew Danzig, Harrison Lampert and Josh Totoro functioned as a Greek chorus, Talmud students, poor women and men, and the proposed bridegroom and his family, among other parts. They were funny and serious and sang and danced well. Speaking of singing, Leah Walton as Fradde (a mother figure for Leah) has a sweet and sure voice. She was perfect in her role.

Brian McCann had the unwelcome job of being the unwitting cause of all the trouble. His Sender was at the right pitch in all of the scenes. He even danced well. The key part of Rabbi Azriel of Miropol (a wise man in charge of the court and exorcism) was David Blatt. Blatt looked the part and handled the transitions to humor well. I would have liked him to have more gravitas in the more serious sections.



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Ed Swidey is "towering in his portrayal of the Messenger" in EgoPo's A DYBBUK. (Photo credit: Ian Paul Guzzone)

Lane Savadore directed the action with an understanding of the traditions involved. Savadore choreographed the scene changes on the small stage fluidly. I liked the way the director handled the Mikvah (ritual bath) scenes.

Matheus Fiuza provided a remarkable set on the very small 3rd floor of the Prince Theater. The use of large prayer shawls as the walls of the set was particularly effective. Matt Sharp's lighting and sound and Katherine Fritz's costumes struck exactly the right note for this production.

A DYBBUK is a challenging evening's viewing. It is a glimpse into the early twentieth century in the pale settlements. It will give a playgoer a little look at a mystical part of Judaism not often on view.

A DYBBUK

by S Ansky

Translated by Joachim Neurgrochel

Adapted by Tony Kushner

Directed by Lane Savadore

May 31-June 17, 2012

Egopo Classic Theater

at Prince Music Theater Cabaret

1412 Chestnut Street

Philadelphia, PA

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