



SPALDING GRAY: STORIES LEFT TO TELL

Naked Angels at the Minetta Lane Theatre

I wept tears—of laughter—all the way through *Spalding Gray: Stories Left to Tell*, a show using the late actor-monologist's words, conceived by his widow, Kathleen Russo, and sharply directed by Lucy Sexton. You might think that because Gray suffered from depression for most of his life and ultimately committed suicide, the show would be a downer. But Gray was a funny, funny man.

His story of living on an all-bean diet while playing an angel in *The World of Sholom Aleichem* is the funniest depiction of gas since *Blazing Saddles*. His self-conscious fear of self-consciousness (not to mention heart attack) during a ceremony at an Indian sweat lodge had me gasping for air from laughing too hard.

The show is life-affirming despite stories of depression and illness. Its structure is mostly chronological, with entries from childhood on. Five outstanding actors represent different subjects: love (Kathleen Chalfant), adventure (Hazelle Goodman), journals (Ain Gordon, who, like Gray did in performance, reads aloud while sitting at a wooden table), family (Frank Wood), and career (a rotating guest performer: Fisher Stevens through March 7, Estelle Parsons March 8–11).

David Korins' suggestive set contains a backdrop of typed sheets of paper and stacks of journals. Original music and sound design by Fitz Patton gracefully evoke time and place.

The actors bring distinct flavors to the words, but the words themselves are the stars. Most poignant are those of Gray's love for his family: "This love alternated like a chain of broken-circuit Christmas lights. I loved Marissa for the way she loved her brother. I loved my son Forrest for the way he loved his mom and turned her into a mother before I could, leaving me to know and love her for the woman she is." His writing is so candid and stirring that it makes you want to keep a journal yourself. When an awful car accident in Ireland left bone fragments in Gray's brain, it caused an emotional shift that therapy could not conquer. Watching him diminish hurts.

Yet the show's final moments revel in the joyful spirit and warm heart of this remarkable artist. His death is a loss, but this show is a gift.

*Presented by Eric Falkenstein and Michael Alden
at the Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, NYC.
March 6–May 13. Tue.–Fri., 8 p.m.; Sat., 3 and 8 p.m.; Sun., 3 and 7 p.m.
(212) 420-8000 or (212) 307-7171 or www.ticketmaster.com.
Casting by Hopkins, Smith & Barden.*

Reviewed by Gwen Orel

Published on BackStage.com on March 6, 2007.

Copyright 2007 The Nielsen Company. All rights reserved.