

nytheatre.com review

Liz Kimberlin · April 8, 2005

The Swan, by Elizabeth Egloff, is quite a remarkable work. It's half allegory, half dream sequence. It's dangerous theatre because it requires that the dramaturg be competent enough to see past the words on the page, which on first read might seem like gibberish. And, once mounted, it assumes that its audience members are all capable of independent thought and imagination. In short, it's my understanding of what theatre is supposed to be all about.

A fairy tale for adults, *The Swan*, set in Nebraska, tells the story of thrice-married Dora Hand, whose last husband shot his brains out a day after their wedding. Spirit beaten by relentless male abandonment, Dora endures a long-term, tediously boring affair with married milkman Kevin. Kevin openly keeps her with his wife's full knowledge, pays her bills, and worships her despite (or possibly because of) her emotional unavailability.

Then, inexplicably, a swan crashes quite literally into their lives through her picture window. The passion Dora denies Kevin suddenly manifests itself in her efforts to nurse the swan, whom she names Bill, back to health. But Bill doesn't merely recover. He transforms into a young handsome human man who knows nothing of human emotional fickleness. He loves Dora with the fervor of a jealous pet. To the equally jealous Kevin's fury, Dora begins to respond in kind, and Kevin's maniacal intervention comes too late as Dora begins her own spiritual—and physical—transformation into a swan.

The set, for the most part, is like Dora's world: sparse, cold, almost sterile—except for the beautiful translucent gauze scrim, designed by Nikolaus Webern, which serves as both picture window and dance floor where the swan finally makes his benefactress's soul one with his own. Eva Burgess's direction keeps the action always flowing.

All three actors handle Egloff's text seamlessly even as it grows increasingly bizarre and surreal. Both Stephanie Barton-Farcas as Dora and T.J. Mannix as bewildered Kevin ably capture the

unromantic, lived-in look of people who have been up and down the dark highway a few times over. Exotically handsome Karam Puri, as Bill the Swan, is superb, especially in his physicalizations. Even as he transmogrifies from wounded bird to curious human, Puri's Swan has no agenda but to heal and to claim his mate.

Nicu's Spoon Productions has done a fine job with this challenging play. Extra kudos for having the courage to mount it in the first place. I hope they can restage it again soon and pull in the audience and sponsorship that they deserve.