

**Entertainment » Theatre**

# Airswimming

by Adam Brinklow  
EDGE Media Network Contributor  
Thursday Aug 10, 2017

[PRINT](#) [EMAIL](#) [COMMENTS \(0\)](#)



Persephone (Katie Anderson, left) and Dora (Annamarie MacLeod)

At the start of "Airswimming" at Redwood City's Dragon Theater, three bare bulbs flicker to life over an ominous set with a staircase to nowhere, a disconnected bathtub, and yawning black entryways.

Nothing good, we decide, will happen to anybody in a place like this (up to and including being cast in some new "Saw" sequel). In practice, we're half right.

This, we soon learn, is an institution for women whom society would prefer just to keep out of the way

Persephone is a would-be debutante -- it's anybody's guess whether her accounts of family and home life are true or not, but

as played by Katie Anderson she appears so firmly wrapped up in bygone glamour that it's pretty clearly real to her -- who of course expects that her recent internment will be entirely temporary.

We've seen this sort of story about a woman unjustly confined in a Kafkaesque network of archaic science and dead-eyed social mores a lot of times before. The part is kind of a big bundle of every feeling possible under the circumstance.

Anderson sorts it all out with aplomb, but you can't shake the feeling that she's getting the short end of the stick compared to her scene partner.

Persephone's only company is Dora (Annamarie MacLeod), locked up apparently for cross-dressing and pursuing her obsession with military history and possibly for harboring certain feelings for other women, although both playwright Charlotte Jones and director Meredith Hagedorn keep that one up in the air.

MacLeod at first appears very affected and even a little ersatz with her stiff upper lip accent, starched posture and unflappable but not quite entirely realized poise. Still, it's hard to take your eyes off of her.

Dora, we sense, is putting something on, but as MacLeod unpacks the part one line at a time it becomes clear she doesn't really need to. She's the real deal underneath it all, and her quiet, knowing, highly sensitive expressions reveal a degree of personal substance and quality that's almost breathtaking.

Just when we think we're about to fall into the rhythms of the pair's day-to-day lives (endlessly cleaning one end of the tiled room to the other in a fruitless exercise of towels that's honestly a little distracting), suddenly the play turns on its head.

All of a sudden both actors are seemingly different women: Porph (Anderson), a manic-depressive oddball obsessed with actress Doris Day, and Dorph (MacLeod again) a paranoid cynic who expects persecution to come down on her head any day now.

Are these the same women? Different women in the same locale? The same play through the other side of the looking glass? For the most part it's hard to say; "Airswimming" is fairly opaque, and the Beckett vibe is vibing pretty hard during these moments.

We get the feeling these manic scenes are not necessarily the most well-rounded depiction of mental illness. But the transition from one life with no horizons or even any differentiation of one day to the next to another of complete liberty -- even from the confines of chronological storytelling -- develops a certain appeal after a while.

To be honest, we'd really prefer if "Airswimming" picked one side of itself or the other and just went with it instead of always interrupting things. As just an exercise in storytelling, the play is too slippery to be gratifying.

But there's more to theater than just telling the story, which of course is why we don't all just sit at home and

read the script instead. Whenever you manage to get two actors feeling real, palpable compassion and empathy in the scene, for a brief magic moment, the world is all theirs.

There are two or three times -- when they look at each other while dancing, when they turn to each other for help, when they both realize at once how appalling life really can be -- both of these stars really get it in that powerful, low-punch kind of way that's always so elusive.

Much as the critical side of us would like to dock "Airswimming" more for its bad habits, we can't. The consistency of the cast, the enduring atmosphere of R. Dutch Fritz's sets, and director Hagedorn's courage seeing a hard show through are just too good.

"Airswimming" plays through August 27 at the Dragon Theatre, 2120 Broadway in Redwood City. For tickets and information, call 650-493-2006 or visit [DragonProductions.net](http://DragonProductions.net)

## Comments

[Add New Comment](#)

## Comments on Facebook

0 Comments

Sort by Oldest



Add a comment...

[Facebook Comments Plugin](#)

## INSIDE EDGE



**GMHC Hosts Walk to the NYC AIDS Memorial**



**Make Your Teen a Millionaire This Summer**



**Rapper Lil Peep Comes Out as Bisexual on Twitter**



**Kentucky Man, Transgender Wife Sue Amazon for Workplace Bias**



**Jessica Molaskey Performs Songs from Her 'Portraits of Joni' Album at Birdland Jazz Club**



**'12:05': Introducing Designer Javier Echenique's Ptown-inspired Clothing Line**

## Network Partners

- Bay Area Reporter
- Bay Windows
- Damron LGBT Travel
- HotSpots! Magazine
- QNotes
- Rage Monthly
- South Florida Gay News

## Things to do

- Get Newsletters
- Learn about EDGE
- Work here
- Visit our Press Room
- Advertise
- Write Feedback
- Read Privacy Statement
- Read Terms of Use
- Contact Us

## Email Updates

Enter your email address below to receive daily email updates including news, giveaways and more.



- Atlanta, GA
- Atlantic City, NJ
- Austin, TX
- Baltimore, MD
- Boston, MA
- Buffalo, NY
- Charlotte, NC
- Chicago, IL
- Cleveland, OH
- Columbus, OH
- Dallas, TX
- Denver, CO
- Detroit, MI
- Ft. Lauderdale, FL
- Fire Island, NY
- Indianapolis, IN
- Key West, FL
- Las Vegas, NV
- Los Angeles, CA
- Miami, FL
- Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN
- Nashville, TN
- New Orleans, LA
- New York, NY
- Orlando, FL
- Palm Springs, CA
- Philadelphia, PA
- Phoenix, AZ
- Pittsburgh, PA
- Portland, OR
- Providence, RI
- Provincetown, MA
- San Diego, CA
- San Francisco, CA
- Seattle, WA
- Washington, DC