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Thoughts on The Chiropractor

written
by

Steve Hubert

about
the
play

The Chiropractor
Unity Gallery
356 Powell Street, Vancouver, BC
November 28, 2015



PEOPLE HAVE BACKBONES AND IT'S
important to have spinal health
The space between each vertebra
A mass to shore the state



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[pause]

There is a nerve that comes from each
And these cushions, these discs,
shall remain e'er healthy
But not fore'er. . .

-Settee, Chiropractor, played by Ashley Macleod

Some months ago I was asked to make something for a one-night-only event at Unity Gallery Projects. At around the same time I visited Dr. Victor Sam, a trusted local chiropractor, to help me with a lower back problem. The morning before that, during breakfast, Meg told me that she once thought a chiropractor had the ability to freeze a person with one touch. For this reason, she surmised, a chiropractor would make an excellent burglar.

Suddenly, things took shape.

I've always loved the theatre: the lively acoustical voices, selective lighting, and the elaborate sets that convert between scenes using only a single hinge. And then there's the basic pleasure of being close enough to reach out and touch the action. You inhabit a real place, a real time, askance of your own reality. I love the strange quality of the air, seemingly propped up on shared experience, the darkness less like a wall than like a deep well, that makes it possible for electricity to flow both ways across psychic space. This special world, that reproduces a trust, can be felt even before you have a chance to think about it. And that's without any discussion of plot or special artistry. Those are just the physical facts, the form, set up by theatre.


In our play, we would have slightly less to work with. The venue for *The Chiropractor* was a small, unmarked print shop on Powell. We mopped the floor three times to get rid of the cat smell. A further unusual feature of the room: there was a Dutch-styled harbour painting that could be slid up on tracks to reveal a prohibition-esque bar. This became the control room for our

Image: Logo for For'er Players Theatre Company and poster for *The Chiropractor*.
Courtesy of the author.



The Chiropractor

NOV. 28,
8pm
356 76th St
2015

Presented By  & Unity Gate Vancouver

lighting and sound effects, and it was from here that wires went out like tendrils. The first scene took place in a cardboard car. For the second scene we had to borrow a black leather couch from where the audience was seated. More than anything, we wanted our play to be unselfconscious, joyful, and meaningful to us. For me, the play needed to immerse one in an illusion, in spite of distractions, so that we could address the fourth wall without actually having to.

The question of the fourth wall was at the forefront of my mind as I began to conceive of what the play would look like, whether it would address the audience directly, invoke and prompt involvement, confront, make them uncomfortable, as progressive theatre sometimes attempts. But the problem for me is that such self-awareness, far from transcending illusion, just adds one more layer of conventionality. Because the audience would probably feel complicit with the actors anyway, given the size of the room and no stage, it seemed best to run counter to expectations by attempting wholeheartedly to embrace illusion—with lights, sound effects, music, dancing, an intermission, a set change—because to use the trappings of a big production would underscore the smallness of our own on the one hand, and on the other, it could set us free from having to make amends for evidence of bravado.

For me, theatre is the wonder of a campfire story, something basic, communal, immediate. As for small diy shows, I think the relative feasibility, lack of creative restraints (and perhaps the freedom from critical infrastructure), could trigger a wave of super low-budget productions. Think of recent shows like Jenny Lee Craig's *Future Smuggler*, or *Fort Eff*, a play by Ingrid Olauson, both of which I missed but heard very good things about. Next, Sunset Terrace will showcase seven short plays in a single night. It all reminds me of those très earnest living room music tours of the late nineties, sort of, except for that now the acting isn't covered over. So go to a play soon and let the curtain reveal things, then protect you, like the breathy bellows of an accordion!