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Epics and nude models and improv, oh my!

Summerworks shows run the gamut, with many a standout

Robert Cushman, National Post
Published: Saturday, August 15, 2009

I had another good one at The Middle Place, which has been assembled by Andrew Kushnir from videoed interviews at an Etobicoke homeless shelter.

Interestingly, the five actors read the transcripts but didn't see the footage, so they had to create rather than impersonate. The results, under Alan Dilworth's direction, are remarkable, both imaginative and respectful: factually-based but more than dramatized social work. Paul Dunn takes Kushnir's place as interviewer, and is thus an actor playing an actor; from the others we have more instant role-changing. Akosua Amo-Adem has massive, though quite different, presence, as both administrator and inmate; Kevin Walker is scarcely less compelling as a thin, shaky, prospective father. The whole is disturbing but not depressing.

For a topping-off Summerworks experience, I recommend Impromptu Splendour, at which three Second City alumni exercise their improvisational chops on parodying a given playwright, whose name is pulled from a hat by a previous audience. At the show I saw, the subject was David Mamet, and though they had time to prepare the essentials -- an office setting, much double-crossing, even more profanity -- they still had to include motifs suggested on the night. Made up or prepared, the results were a scream, with an accuracy that at times approached the poetic. Matt Baram and Ron Pedersen were perfect, and if Naomi Snieckus seemed less so -- well, nobody said that Mamet was any place for women. - Summerworks closes tomorrow. Visit summerworks.ca for details.

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