

Exhibitionism – *Local Arts Reviews*

By Wayne Alan Brenner



City Water Tunnel #3: Groundbreaking Performance

The Off Center, March 2

Running Time: 1 hr, 30 min

Marty Pottenger, all by herself, performing *City Water Tunnel #3* as part of the Rude Mechanicals' *Throws Like A Girl* series, is not going to knock your socks off. You're not, as you're watching her, as you're listening to her, going to think: "Damn, this woman is an absolutely riveting presence, a polished theatre professional whose every move is an exercise in perfection."

But you don't *need* to think that: You're going to be too busy thinking about other things. About what it's like to work on the largest non-defense public works project in the Western Hemisphere. About what it's like to spend your days wrangling hundreds of pounds of dynamite, hundreds of tons of rock and dirt and mud (muck, they call it), earth-boring machines, drills the size of minivans, water pipes and their attendant valves, and all the kinds of equipment and procedures necessary to precisely compromise our planet's thick crust. Even about what it's like to die violently, doing this.

Pottenger brings this little-seen world to the Off Center stage, using relevant job-site props (ladders, bags of cement, hardhats, a water level), a video highlighting aspects of the actual project, and a series of monologues to better illustrate the subject and her experience researching it. It's one hell of a story, a multifaceted glimpse into an enormous subterranean endeavor and all the pain and suffering and joy that goes into it while the rest of us perform our (usually) more pedestrian day jobs above ground.

We hear -- through Pottenger's impersonations -- the voices of sandhogs talking about union dynasties, of geologists waxing philosophical on the peregrinations of tectonic plates, of ordinary folk whose hometowns have been purposefully and permanently flooded to provide reservoir space. And we hear Pottenger, too, in her own voice, speaking of the barriers she had to overcome in documenting all the activity and of the sometimes reluctant kinship she felt with the workers involved. She stops the flow of narrative at times to demonstrate the use of a water level or to perform a sort of interpretive dance with a utility ladder; and she does this in such a way that it's disarming. There's no Disneyfied slickness of presentation going on here: There's a woman, a particular woman, Marty Pottenger, and as best as she can, she's sharing what she's learned and she's sharing her feelings about it. As she brings us tales of the human side of heavy demolition and construction -- many of them scraped into the walls of auditory memory by the literally earth-shaking sound design of Mio Morales -- she's also bringing us a very human performance, becoming no less a character than those colorful individuals she's interviewed.

If the Department of Environmental Protection hired someone to provide this wealth of information, that someone couldn't do a better job -- if only because the resultant show would be infused with the sort of rah-rah spin-doctory sales job that taints most corporate PR. Here, we get the truth, as plain and raw as the earth that's being tunneled, as bright and ragged as the people tunneling. We understand, finally, the deeper need for labor; and we understand it through this labor of love.

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