



Rude Mechs: The Method Gun at DTW

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Maybe it's because I had attended [Wooster Group's Vieux Carré](#) the week before. As well as seeing [Green Eyes at the Hudson Hotel](#) a month earlier. And then there was the incredible production of [A Streetcar Named Desire](#) starring [Cate Blanchett](#) over a year ago at BAM. With it being his 100th anniversary and all, Tennessee Williams has been on my mind an awful lot as of late. So [Rude Mechs'](#) production of *The Method Gun*—a satire of an "experimental" Streetcar production absent any of the lead characters—didn't need to stretch itself much for me to appreciate it.



I'll admit, for a bit I was unsure what I was watching. Partly it was because the production is at [Dance Theater Workshop \(and continues through this Saturday\)](#), and the performance appears to basically be theater, not dance. But there is quite a bit of expressive movement. Of course, the week before I'd experienced Norwegian art collective [Verdensteatret's](#) sound and art installation in the same space, so I know that DTW is expanding its boundaries beyond contemporary dance. But by the end of *The Method Gun*, I was completely convinced I'd seen an astounding piece of meta-theater-dance-art. Whatever label we must put on it, it's a production that must be experienced to be appreciated.

I'll try to articulate my own interpretation of what's going on with this sly and, at points, surreal stage production. I've already argued about it with a few people, so I know not everyone will agree. The basic storyline is about a 1970s acting company enthralled with their guru Stella Burden, a fictional character that seems to be a blend of acting coach Stella Adler and performance artist [Chris Burden](#). The incredibly adept five-person ensemble slips in and out of expository moments, audience participation and performing as the fictional acting troupe. At one point an actor with a tiger head appears and mimes conversation while another performer (E. Jason Liebrecht) speaks his monologue. Lana Lesley, a particularly powerful performer, plays piano while delivering a strange monologue. Thomas Graves, a standout of the group, breaks into an interpretative dance at one point, which is cringe-inducing as he throws himself on the floor and flops and pops-and-locks in his especially tight period pants. A particularly funny scene involves Graves and Liebrecht, the only two male performers, walking onstage naked with helium balloons tied to their penises. See? That's why I said I wasn't sure what I was watching. With all the weirdness, the actual acting of the small Streetcar parts was eye-opening, and really did provide a strange insight into those odd little roles that are typically ignored as scenery to the Stanley-Blanche dyad. I felt it was part satire, poking fun at all the constraints and hurdles many actors, directors, choreographers and dancers place on themselves in an effort to create—when, often, the simple approach is all that may be needed.

Then there is this final, amazing, elegiac finale. The industrial lights hanging above the actors unlock, and they begin to swing. It's a complete surprise (sorry if I spoiled it for you). The cast of five performers proceed to silently construct the play as their Streetcar characters, avoiding the four swinging lights attached to metal bars as if it were a Lara Croft obstacle course. The tension and risk that was discussed throughout the play is thick in the air. While I had relaxed during the previous hour, I was suddenly gripping my seat, worried that one of these lights would smack an actor in the face. Although it bordered on gimmicky (especially when a fifth light descended and added more difficulty to the scene), I was left breathless by this unlikely solution to the production. A final detail: rolling credits of names of our own "teachers" or gurus that we had written at the top of the show were projected. And I felt tears come to my eyes. Who knew experimental theater could be both daring and sentimental all at once?