

# Loco7's "Undefined Fraction" at La MaMa

By the Editor (/Category/by-the-editor) / Loco7's "Undefined Fraction" at La MaMa

November 25, 2015

I got to pay a visit to one of my all-time favorite indie theaters, La MaMa E.T.C., for a performance of *Undefined Fraction*, which is part of the company's 2015 Puppet Series. This blend of edgy puppetry, physical theater, and dance--performed to the gorgeous live accompaniment of musicians Juan Bayon, Chris Zaborowski, and Tareke Ortiz (who is also the composer)--is an exemplar of the kind of meditative hybrid installation/happening/drama that has been a mainstay of this East Village institution for decades.

The play is conceived by Denise Greber and Federico Restrepo, and is inspired by the classic Spanish play *Life is a Dream*. In their program note, Denise and Federico tell us:

We cut almost all the text, deleted characters, combined characters and even made up a few characters. We wanted to touch upon the idea of free will, what make us (humans) do what we do?... Are we born "belligerent," taught how to behave, and told what we should believe in?

70 minutes long, *Undefined Fraction* is abstract, sometimes mystifying, yet frequently mystical and often quite evocative. The bare outline of the story of *Life is a Dream* is discernible, beginning with the prophecy that leads the King to imprison his only son within a tower (the towers are beautifully delineated, in ten enormous columns that serve as the set/environment for the work, as well as in views fabricated mostly from light that define prisons the various characters find themselves in). The son, Sigismund, eventually is freed and (as the program words it) "given a chance to show he is not a beast." Sigismund has a brief turn as king, and then returns to his prison.

For me, the theme that resonates most from the work is the wastefulness of incarceration. Sigismund's wretchedness in prison is conveyed strongly; in a historical moment when our country has so many people locked up behind bars, there was much food for thought in this.

I was also fascinated by some of the design elements, especially the puppet renderings of the imprisoned Sigismundo, a boy and then a man built from what look like chain links, obviously manipulated, first bunraku-style and later as a human-sized marionette. There are also enormous giant-sized puppets (notably the hand of fate that hovers over the proceedings throughout); these massive creations are a hallmark of the work of Denise and Federico's Loco7 Dance Puppet Theatre Company. Costumes are by Becky Hubbert. Puppets, lights, and choreography are designed by Federico Restrepo.

It's a haunting and somewhat draining experience, the kind that engages the imagination and can only happen in live theater.