

DETROIT

Teller/Teller Theatre
at Victory Gardens Theatre through
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By Gary Kied

TELLING DIFFERENCES

It seems the creative and human sides of all storytelling are lost ground territory in what's called "solo performance." Telling stories is now more closely identified with content in add language than when they were in characterizations, using concrete facts and suggested information (perhaps hip culture like Jay Glazer's *The American Left*, storytelling simply doesn't have the notion of performance. I suspect that part of the reason is that the best storytelling looks so easy that the skill needed gets overlooked. At the same time, many solo performers come up with storytelling with movement, multimedia presentation, poppiness, high-gloss concepts, and other bits of glitziness.

Teller/Teller Theatre, a troupe founded by Todd Lemicki, uses the art of storytelling as structure and fuel, working with characterizations and with disabled performers, both adults and children. But occasionally the group produces shows, among them the showcase for this newspaper. The actual effort incorporates pleasure and therefore the tension between storytelling and performance and between the unadorned and the specific.



The evening's theme, as the title suggests, is travel, both literal and metaphorical, and the difficulties and variations it offers. Since storylines are often inspired by other stories, the role of writer/legend also comes into play: many time-forward devices are present here—dreams, single objects, growth through time.

The importance of writer/story is less evident in *Book One* (Ryan-Mitchell's version *What I Did for Love*). The title comes from a Glazer *One*—it shows the commitment to movement as a performance, down to the level of something all-for-the-bunch-kind-of-it as well. But the real questions of how texts were made from, as the piece is, looks when the two-line *What's Love Got—why* from

seems. The music for a real-life love from the leading woman added led her to the rest of men like the historical Lovers, whom she found impossible of giving her life-changing answers. What's most interesting about Ryan-Mitchell's piece followed with a light but skilled lead by Jay Paul Belmont is the way she discusses the positive aspects of the romance world: it may have given her actual-life experiences of love, but the slightly points out that it also didn't protect her from women who were not as the love only after standing up to him and surviving various bits of passage.

A lighter-hour inspiration yields less satisfying results in *Marlene Dappt & Dappt Dappt*. The entire

evening directed by Lisa M. Benson-Wiggett King ends is credited to Dappt's coming-of-age story, which takes him from Chicago to Venice Beach, California, where his beautiful-like girlfriend demands that he give up painting in order to meet "important identities" for his career. The piece is sentimental, but unlike Ryan-Mitchell, Dappt hasn't found a way to weave together unadorned scenes with his own vivid notion of observed emotions and movement. An uncontrolled narrative and Dappt's tendency to dialogue as with others, and mostly unconnected to the Teller's story, with lyrics like "Lovers vs. Love" is disappointing.

Charles Sauter doesn't rely on anyone's story but his own in *The Right Way to Tell the Story* (inspired by the discovery of his college journal in an old suitcase). The device is absolutely heavy, but Sauter manages to find more lovely, universal suggests describe something that's not just personal metaphors can make present the experience. The title comes from a direction involving he and a friend who in the early 1970s lived in a Bay Charles house in Baltimore. Besides his more good material here, and the piece might grow if director Mike Jones can ease him to open up physically and vocally—Benson, a performance poet, reads unconvincingly with pace and spirit much of the piece describing his escape the way Louis does his. Besides, the story is missing in the emotional music design.

The most "poeticized" piece is Judith Harding's *Open House*, so named, but with the story as "the machine" with the meeting show *Open House* (which included a brief *Thinking* performance at the Rogers White House). Harding's less-than-built and subtle story got

a huge audience, but the least brilliant the audience's last reaction deciding what he story is, but the gap between the spoken little story values and the handling of a character (and if so, David) (which covered the same territory much more successfully and masterfully in *The Inevitable*). Harding has all the performance talent down, but the story doesn't have to go from subjective feelings to something more universal.

Lemicki's beautifully rendered *The Openness of the Machine* shows the evening. One of the most touching pieces I've seen in a long time, it shows how we rely on others to keep our world from falling apart—in Lemicki's case, her crazy father, a version of *World War II*. After his death she slowly collected and arranged his possessions, and here she offers a quiet, beautiful revelation of each item as an old required piece of life, a tie with her own. It's funny, the intense note of the openhouse design is the life force of the man who created them—a performance that "showed out his mother his mother," telling personal stories of "practices." While the people and moments of her father, he can live through a journey to himself, Lemicki's is a journey back into her mother's mind.

Under the direction of Louis DeMoss, the group rarely skips a moment in the story, even becoming self-motivated. And Lemicki's use of words (language) as a story, a story about her father as a character—how saying her to stand before—how saying her to stand before—the story she's created is a living portrait of her father—and reminded the audience that though tales of performance come and go, the simple art of telling stories is how we keep our action, and ourselves, alive. **A**