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There's a scene in Theresa Rebeck's one-woman comedy *Bad Dates* - currently being produced by New Ground Theatre - in which our protagonist, Haley, is seen trying on clothes. Actually, nearly *every* scene features Haley trying on clothes, but I'm referring to the opening sequence, in which she's preparing for the first date she's had since ditching her good-for-nothing husband in Texas and moving to New York. With the audience cast as Haley's confidantes, this single mom and restauranteur tells us of her divorce and her 13-year-old daughter and her recent experiences at a Tibetan Buddhist book benefit, and all the while she tries on skirts, blouses, and lots and *lots* of shoes; no ensemble, it seems, is working for her.

Finally, Haley finds an outfit to her liking - complete with a shoulder wrap that looks vaguely like a piñata - and steps in front of the (imaginary) full-length mirror to gauge the effect. "This," she states, "is a total disaster."

It's the first - and not the last - big laugh in the show, but it's not the line itself that tickles you; it's Lora Adams' reading of it. After more than 10 minutes of breathless, nearly stream-of-consciousness anecdotes, Adams takes only the slightest of pauses before delivering a mildly dejected "Thisisatotaldisaster" and preparing Haley's wardrobe anew. You laugh because, in about two seconds of stage time, Adams reveals her character's flightiness, her ability to switch thought patterns on a dime, her charming self-deprecation, and - by realizing that her outfit *is* a disaster - her basic good sense. Rebeck deserves praise for creating such an

endearingly vivid protagonist, but it's Lora Adams, and her inspired director, Patti Flaherty, who turn New Ground's *Bad Dates* into the best kind of 90-minute monologue: one that truly succeeds as a *play*.

Flaherty's success at this, in particular, shouldn't be undervalued, as solo performances of this sort can often feel static; with only one figure to focus on, directors - in an attempt to vary the stage picture - will frequently resort to aimless pacing or meandering on the part of their protagonists, and that's when the characters are moving at *all*. Yet until the play's final, contemplative scene, Flaherty directs Adams as if she were a one-woman bedroom farce. Continually traversing between her closet and her bed and the mirror and the off-stage hallway - where she occasionally shouts out to her daughter in the next room - Haley is in almost constant motion. Yet the movement always feels *purposeful*; the character's incessant wardrobe changes don't appear intended as distraction, but rather as a physical representation of Haley's inner (comedic) chaos.

And the timing in these sequences is spectacular. Not only does Haley rarely stop moving; she rarely stops *talking*. Yet there's nothing artificial about the way Flaherty choreographs the character's dialogue with her movement; it never feels as if Adams has to hit a particular beat at a particular time in the script - she just *does*. There's a freshness and spontaneity to this production that could easily go unnoticed. Haley's (one-sided) conversations with the audience, and her unselfconscious attempts to find the ideal outfit, feel no more or less dramatic than real life, and they unfurl with the occasionally sloppy, fascinating *ease* of real life; Flaherty's presentation, like the show's character, doesn't feel the least bit forced. It takes enormous skill to make such a carefully orchestrated piece look so relaxed, and while *Bad Dates* is a minor, mostly lighthearted play, it has been crafted with the utmost care.

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