

THEATRE



David Tabatsky; acting, miming, juggling and ad-libbing with charm and audacity.

Old Place, New Space

Chamber theatre
finds a (temporary)
home in Hartford

By Margaret Johansson

A tow-headed boy passed by on the way to his seat. "You're not supposed to blow bubbles," he said, referring to the pink bottles on the chair-arms. "Why not?" "Because they're part of the show." Yet blowing bubbles was the most appropriate way to introduce "A Funny Show," created and performed by David Tabatsky with the considerable musical collaboration of pianist Barbara Frauenglass and guitarist Jeffrey Zweig. Part of a series called "Playerspace at the Old Place," Tabatsky's show is about suspension—and suspense. Acting, miming, juggling, ad libbing, he generally delights the audience with his vulnerable charm and audacity.

The telephone rings and a tape starts. "Hi. This is David Tabatsky. I'm not onstage now, but if you give me a standing ovation or two, I'll be sure to appear. Please begin on the sound of the beep...." And it works, because by this time he has totally won us over. From the butterfly collector "with his whimsical fantasies as peaceful company" to the Corporate Clown, Tabatsky's saucer eyes, squirming eyebrows, and agility are physical manifestations of a sense of the outrageous. He calls to the *Lepidoptera* with kazoo and tuba; he sells his shirt with an auctioneer's palaver ("size medium—it can stretch to large, shrink to small"); he tells a story with his hands, in which we read various stages of acquaintanceship and intimacy.

Juggling is one of Tabatsky's fortes. What you see makes the brain seem slow and sluggish, and if you blink you're likely to miss something. Three oblong boxes seem to operate on springs; he moves the leftmost one and the other two seem to hang in air. Crossing arms, changing hands, juggling under one leg, changing directions smoothly, Tabatsky plays with optical illusion. Placing an apple among the balls, he takes a bite out of it whenever it comes back to his hand. Fire-batons provided suspense, but Tabatsky—like his pianist—never seemed to miss a beat unless to create character-by-blunders, stamping out a non-existent spark when a baton fell.

The second half of "A Funny Show," "for adults," is a "date" between the actors and the audience, lit by candle, incensed by musk. "Sex, Drugs, & Rock and Rolls" exploits laid-back, loose-hipped rock star mannerisms. Tabatsky invites us all to summon our erotic fantasies: "Are you waiting to see me do something sexual on the stage? I can't do that here. I'm Jewish. It's Friday night."

When the would-be Corporate Clown applies at the Big Tall Building in "I Need a Job," we intuit the frustrations of many individual artists in the area. A B.A., Binaca, and couture classique ("I checked my *Hartford Advocate*—I'm hip") are apparently inadequate concessions to the business world. Forced to kiss ass, he kicks ass instead—and waxes serious to tell about the "Birth of Everything" as he blows up a balloon that bursts when the Corporate Jane tries to touch it. The message—and this is no mere advertisement in a concert program—is that the arts are vital to Hartford.

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