

Reviews for PANEL. ANIMAL a double bill of previous shows: The Young Wars and Sandwich - These are reviews of the double bill evening.

Helen Shaw

Panel.Animal

Time Out New York, May 26 - June 1, 2005

WHAT'S COOKIN'? As a sinister chef, playwright Craig dishes up a treat.
Panel.Animal

If you were the type of child who briefly went vegetarian after reading Charlotte's Web, Jason Craig's Sandwich may drive you off your grub for life. And it won't be just the cute, roly-poly meals you'll reject, either - you may find yourself looking around guiltily every time you chop a head of lettuce. But tighten your belts, folks, because losing your appetite never tasted so delicious.

In a meat-locker-cum-fairground-booth, mad chefs Craig and Jessica Jelliffe elaborately prepare a BLT. Tiny fans waft bacony scents toward the crowd, and audience enthusiasm for the sandwich soon matches that of the two cooks in the nude suits. But for every luncheon treat, someone's friend must lose a life. Sad Cat (Heather Peroni) mourns Piggy (now "hairlessandinklessand-facelessandcharred!") and will not be comforted. Trying to cheer her up, the cooks get her a new animal pal. Kitty likes to play rough, though, and once she gets a birthday knife ("those fuckers took my claws!"), it looks like transparentplasticcurtains for Bunny (played by a giant stuffed rabbit).

Cheerfully obscene - one song focuses exclusively on a chicken's back end - the company obsesses over the filthiness of consumption. While individual characters slash and stab each other, collectively they skewer American greed. Accompanied by Kurt Weill-style pounding piano, Sandwich would have made Bertolt Brecht proud (if Brecht had had a plushy fetish). Stab whom you have to for a ticket: Sandwich is play-making at its meatiest.

Brook Stowe
Panel.Animal
Theater2k, 03 June 2005

WHO IS BANANA, BAG & BODICE AND WHAT DO THEY WANT
Gypsy Theater Troupe Plunges Down a Dark Hole of Meat and Sex in Wburg

Walking through Williamsburg these days is getting downright scary. The streets are looking too clean, the buildings too well-kept, the graffiti too self-conscious and contained. And the Good Times dive bar at Metropolitan and Berry? Goodbye. This week, it's some chi-chi south-of-the-border theme joint. Next week, who knows. Starbucks, maybe.

Fortunately, the dive next door is still just that -- a cheerfully fetid little barn otherwise known as the Collapsable Hole, home to those estimable theatrical outlaws, Collapsable Giraffe and Radiohole. And, through Saturday, worthy guests as well: Banana, Bag & Bodice -- late of San Francisco, now of Brooklyn, soon to be of Montreal -- with a pair of one-acts, "Panel (The Young War: A Panel Discussion on the Death of Love)" and "Animal (Sandwich: A Musical about Killing Animals)."

In "Panel," BB&B founders Jason Craig and Jessica Jelliffe join with Heather Peroni, Rod Hipskind (who looks more than a little like Willem Dafoe) and Peter Blomquist (who looks kind of like Christopher Walken) to unleash a collective musing on the nature of love that is by turns jaded and hopeful, manic and lethargic.

Amidst recurring themes of hula hoops, denim slacks, counting to 20 and the definition of perineum, BB&B delivers its poetic barrage as a kind of modal-scale, post-bop quintet of the spoken word, scattering a dancing pattern of word-notes over a deep, swelling octave of desire.

"Panel"'s ultimate power is one of a torrent of vivid word-images, at once fleetingly familiar and disconcertingly askew. It is as if being swept into a waking dream, ineffable and unsettling on its surface, yet seductive and enticing in its power as it pulls you down, ever down in a swirling alliterative whirlpool of lust, longing and loss.

"Animal" is less cohesive than "Panel" but more purely, ecstatically theatrical. Where Dave Malloy's original compositions tended toward Satie-inflected wistfulness in "Panel," "Animal" is primarily two-fisted Kurt Weill cabaret.

To this end, BB&B's second offering benefits greatly from the live piano presence of the very supple Sarah Engelke, who segues seamlessly from Malloy's robust Bierhalle stein-clankers to a lilting cover of "Embraceable You" inbetwixt sprawling flat on her belly pounding the innards of her piano and flapping about the stage in a frantic, frenzied tap dance.

And then there's Craig's Apocalyptic Armadillo sequence that brings Jamie

McElhinney's sound design and Miranda Hardy's lighting to an appropriately bizarre and very effective crescendo. When was the last time you saw a giant armadillo gripped by the throes of an angst-ridden monologue whilst being hounded by The Giant Blue Light From Beyond?

Thought so. Which is reason enough right there to encourage Craig, Jelliffe & Co, to return right here following that gig up north. NYC theater needs them. Williamsburg needs them. If only to help keep the Starbucks away a little while longer.